BUILDING COMMUNITY:
A SOCIOLOGY OF THEATRE AUDIENCES

INTRODUCTION

There is a degree of intangibility about the concept of community, which this thesis aims to go some way towards dispelling. At the same time the study of community recurs in sociology because of its continued relevance in the face of social change. There are constant accusations that community is being undermined by social change; that it inevitably has an adverse impact on human interaction. As a sociologist with a longstanding interest in drama and theatre, I am endeavouring in this thesis to bring the two fields of study together to the benefit of both, but especially to illuminate the concept of community.

The thesis builds on the exploratory research into theatre audiences as communities that is the subject of my Masters' dissertation (Hayes 2002). This earlier research suggested that communities of various kinds are potentially present among theatre audiences. I had long suspected this, since my own theatre visits, and discussion with others who share my interest, had provided experiences that seemed very similar to sociologists' descriptions of the nature of community. Audiences are useful in the study of community precisely because of such shared interests and meanings in response to productions. Where audiences are attending live performance, they offer the opportunity to examine co-present community especially, as well as community in an imagined sense through an awareness of others who also share their interests and tastes. While there have been a number of studies of live audiences for music, particularly popular music, and sport, theatre audiences have received little attention so far. In this thesis I examine theatre audiences' experience of community, and show how the study of theatre audiences can illustrate the ways in which community is built.

My approach to the study of community differs from previous work on the subject because it does not look *either* at local, geographically based community *or* at more recent kinds of community such as imagined or virtual communities. Instead, it considers a particular kind of ad hoc co-present community, which is the audience for

a theatre performance. Such an approach provides an opportunity to study processes of community formation as they occur. Further, this thesis examines the whole trajectory of the theatregoing experience, from theatregoers' life narratives, through attendance at performances, to discussion with people who share their interests, to see how community is experienced throughout. By examining also how else theatregoers experience community in their everyday lives, the thesis assesses whether newer forms of community are meaningful in their lives, thus allowing a comparison between co-present and imagined or virtual community experience.

Originally, I became interested in audiences through a concern about the effects of violence on television. Research paradigms at that time emphasized the effects of the mass media and saw the viewer as victim. Intervening paradigms have stressed the possibility of active audiences and the importance of audience context, and the most recent paradigm focuses on how audiences can themselves be performative. I am encouraged, therefore, to be able to see audiences as examples of community, rather than as victims. My research takes place within these later paradigms, stressing the activity of audiences, the importance of their contexts, and their practices in everyday life.

Focusing on processes of community formation, my research is a qualitative study of theatregoers' cultural tastes and practices. It complements Bourdieu's quantitative study of cultural consumption, taking a more extensive and intensive view of one particular group. In my methodology I examine theatregoers' life narratives and meanings of theatre in their lives in an ethnographic approach to audience studies. I attach considerable importance to audiences' own interpretations and to collaboration, both in audience practices and in the interviews. In view of my own position as both researcher and theatregoer, I have been reflexively aware throughout.

In addressing the main aims of the thesis, to illuminate the nature of community, the processes of its formation, and the extent of new ways of experiencing it, I raise, discuss, and shed light on the issues involved through the following structure. In the first chapter, I consider sociological ideas about the nature

of community, and the arguments for and against social change as an undermining influence on community. These arguments raise the major issue, which has been put forward since sociology began, of whether face-to-face community can be replaced or complemented by newer ways of experiencing it. They include Durkheim's shift from 'mechanical' to 'organic' society, and community studies in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century, which examined how far particular geographical areas were community based and how far they were contractually based. The issue is still present in current debates on globalization, which question whether imagined and virtual communities can replace face-to-face community. All along the line the argument has been that newer forms of community are less fulfilling than face-to-face community in human terms. In this thesis I employ recent discussion on social capital to assess the importance of interpersonal communication in the construction of community.

The concept of culture underlies Raymond Williams's ideas on the nature of community, which for him was based on collective social relations, or class, and was a force in resisting social change. I consider whether culture *is* underpinned by class, and examine whether theatregoers' cultural consumption patterns follow Bourdieu's findings that theatregoers are either bourgeois audiences for mainstream theatre or intellectual audiences for avant-garde theatre. Bourdieu's concept of habitus is significant in my discussion of theatregoers' life narratives, which provide longitudinal data on how respondents have acquired theatregoing tastes and practices. I discuss how far family and class do play a part in the development of cultural consumption patterns. Here too I look at recent research suggesting that cultural consumption is not strictly based on class gradations. Through an examination of theatregoers' overall patterns of cultural consumption and other activities, I assess how far ideas of middle class omnivorous consumption of both high and popular culture and lower class univorous consumption are supported. I also consider the properties of symbolic boundaries, examining where they are strong, like those pertaining to high culture in France, and where they are weak, as they are in more tolerant cultures.

In Chapter Two I discuss how the study of audiences can shed light on community and review the previous work on audiences that is relevant to this thesis. I emphasize the importance of sharing to community, and the necessary examination of communication practices among people to facilitate moving on from considering audience context to understanding community experience. I discuss how audience response indicates shared meanings between performers and audiences and among audience members, and examine in the research how it underpins the formation and re-formation of community. The research also relates the data to previous observational studies of audience response at political meetings and interaction in everyday life. A discussion of interpretive communities and the literature on fans' practices raises issues about differences between audiences for high and popular culture, questioning whether there is any distinction between art and entertainment and the communities that form to appreciate them. The review of studies that pave the way for my research emphasizes audience context and communication practices, and raises the following issues that are addressed in this thesis. I examine gender and cultural consumption, especially the idea of escape and meanings of theatregoing in women's lives. The studies reviewed include work on audiences for both live and mediatized production, and I discuss differences between these audience experiences. I suggest that such experiences underpin differences between co-present and imagined communities, and in the research address how much theatregoers also access mediatized production and how fulfilling they find both forms of experience in human terms. Finally in this chapter I review work on changes in audience perception. This includes ideas on interpretive practices and on whether productions can raise questions in audiences' minds. The thesis examines the nature of theatregoers' interpretive practices and discusses especially how far they are shared. It also assesses how much theatregoers do question the issues raised by the performances they see and, again because of the critical importance of sharing to community, how much they are discussed with others.

Chapter Three focuses more closely on theatre audiences and the particular resonances they have for the study of community. First I develop the discussion at the end of Chapter Two on changes in audience perception by considering theatre as an arena for debate. I focus especially on the subject matter of theatre, how it reflects

issues in society and whether it raises questions in audiences' minds, which are then shared with others. My frameworks for this discussion include Raymond Williams's concept of 'structure of feeling', and theatre practitioners' ideas. I then discuss theatre as an art form, examining changes in theatre conventions and how they have led to more active audiences in recent times. I set out the interactions that are intrinsic to theatre performances, drawing on Susan Bennett's work on theatre audiences and again on Raymond Williams's work, this time on changes in dramatic form. Such changes underpin variations in theatre playing spaces and here I discuss theatre buildings and auditoria and their influence on community experience at the whole theatregoing event. I consider the fans' literature on the emotional significance of place, which contrasts with some earlier ethnographic community studies' ideas that people are more important than buildings for engendering community spirit. I then draw on theatre practitioners' ideas on how different shapes and sizes of auditoria influence audience response and community experience. These include the views of theatre architects, designers, directors and actors.

Having discussed in the first three chapters sociological issues of community, how the study of audiences can illuminate community, and how understanding theatre audiences is particularly resonant for community, and indicated the major issues the research addresses, in Chapter Four I describe in detail the origins, methodology, and progress of the research. I explain how the research builds on my exploratory study, examining further audience response, life narratives, meanings of theatregoing to people, their affective attachment to theatre places, and drawing on interviews with a director and actors as well as audience members. I discuss the research design and methodology and how the research sites and samples were selected. I describe first the two theatres, giving illustrations of their locations, buildings and seating plans in an appendix, and then the plays and performances from which the sample is drawn. Included is an overall demographic profile of the audience member respondents and their theatregoing characteristics, and individual respondent profiles. Appendices show how the demographic data were collected. Descriptions of the content and conduct of the interviews are given, and the schedules are available in further appendices. Details of how the data were analysed complete this chapter.

Chapters Five to Eight present, interpret and discuss the data, relating them to the issues of community raised in the first three chapters. The structure of these chapters follows the trajectory of the whole theatregoing experience, examining community experience throughout. In Chapter Five I focus on audience contexts, including here respondents' perception of what sort of people go to the theatre and comparing these ideas with the actual sample. This demographic approach examines age and gender, but concentrates especially on social class and whether theatregoers conform to the class distinctions, tastes and practices that Bourdieu indicates. I then discuss how respondents have become theatregoers, and relate the findings to the concept of habitus. I assess how far family and class have influenced their cultural tastes and practices and how far there have been other influences over the life course. The data from respondents' life narratives are especially rich, enabling a comprehensive view of influences on the development of theatregoing tastes and practices. I follow this aspect of how people become theatregoers with a discussion of respondents' preferences for live or mediatized performance and audience experience. Here the actor respondents' ideas about performance in both these kinds of production complement the audience member respondents' experiences, and provide greater depth to understanding the interaction processes involved and their impact on community experience. From this understanding we can see how theatregoers have formed their preference for live performance. In the last section of this chapter I look at audience member respondents' social networks, including their theatregoing companions, and the social aspects of their other cultural consumption and activities. I assess the relative incidence of respondents' interpersonal and mediatized interaction and what each means to them in terms of community experience. I also consider whether they are omnivore or univore in their cultural consumption and activities and relate these features to their social class.

In Chapter Six I focus on the co-present interactions taking place at theatre performances, discussing first the interactions between actors and audiences. The actor respondents were particularly interested in how the dynamic between themselves and the audience works, and again provided ideas that complement the audience members' views. In the second part of the chapter I discuss how audience members interact to produce collective audience response. Throughout these first

two sections of the chapter I examine how the interactions taking place encourage or discourage the formation of community, discussing the data in the light of previous work on audience response. I also relate the data on interactions at theatre performances to those in everyday life, developing ideas on how community is experienced through interpersonal communication. In addition in this chapter, I consider the data on respondents' ideas about the influence of theatre auditoria on audience response and community experience. This extends previous work on response at political meetings, which usually take place in large halls, by discussing the impact of different shapes and sizes of auditorium. At the end of the chapter, I draw out the features of interactions at theatre performances and the characteristics of different kinds of auditorium that encourage or discourage community experience, and relate them to communication processes and community in everyday life.

Continuing the trajectory of the whole theatregoing experience, Chapter Seven describes the kinds of changes in audience perception that take place both at theatre performances and as audience members carry on with their everyday lives. I discuss the kinds of changes shared through audience response at performances and how collective response reflects community experience. I consider the data in the light of previous work on interpretive practices and meanings in audience members' lives for television programmes, films, novels, and the arts generally. Particularly here I restructure previous categorizations, drawing attention to the cultural aspects of pleasure and enjoyment, rather than considering them as psychological interpretations, as the fans' literature especially has done. I develop ideas on meanings of theatregoing in people's lives, and on gender and cultural consumption as escape.

The extent to which changes in audience perception are shared through discussion with others outside the performance and in everyday life is examined in Chapter Eight, and I emphasize the importance of discussion with others to the formation of community. Overall this chapter looks at community experience through the wider theatre event. I consider how the urban and rural contexts of the research theatres affect respondents' everyday communication practices and community experiences. I examine the meanings to respondents of theatre facilities

and buildings, relating their ideas to previous work on the emotional significance of place, and reflecting on the relative importance for community of people and places. In the Conclusion to the thesis, I draw out how this research on theatre audiences has shed light on the issues of community raised in the early chapters, and suggest directions for future research.

CHAPTER ONE
SOCIAL CHANGE AND COMMUNITY

Introduction

This first chapter highlights the sociological issues that have arisen, from the founding fathers of sociology to present debate, as community has been affected by social change. In the first part of the chapter on how community study in sociology has moved from local to global contexts therefore, I consider the founding fathers' insights into the ramifications for community of earlier social changes brought about by the Industrial and French Revolutions. I then discuss how ethnographic community studies in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century attempted to bridge the 'great divide' between community based and contractually based society. Drawing on these studies, I highlight issues of the significance of local community in the face of social change that are relevant to the exploration of both co-present community and community in the context of social change in the wider society that are the central concerns of this thesis. Next I examine early ideas on symbolic boundaries, to provide initial purchase on how community might be experienced in an imagined sense in today's mediatized and globalized society. At this point I indicate how the thesis builds on the tradition of community study in sociology.

Continuing the theme of social change and community, and providing further insights into the constitution of community, the second section of the chapter draws on Raymond Williams's exposition of the "long revolution", which incorporates the idea of culture into the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution and democracy. Williams's work is important throughout this thesis because it provides an early synthesis of ideas from sociology, culture and drama, which supports the interdisciplinary nature of this research. In particular, his ideas on drama and performance and their relevance for sociology and culture have often been neglected, and I indicate their significance. As well as the impact of social change on community, another key issue in this thesis is the extent to which cultural consumption is class based. Here I discuss Williams's ideas on class as a common culture, and also consider his view that there is no real distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture. At this juncture I bring in more recent research, applicable to these arguments about class and cultural consumption, which suggests that cultural tastes

among the middle class are eclectic or omnivorous, but that lower class taste tends to be univore, focusing on one area of cultural consumption.

Staying with the theme of social class, in the third section of the chapter I examine Bourdieu's findings that cultural consumption reflects the distinctions between classes and class fractions. I then discuss other ideas in Bourdieu's work that will be shown to be important for this thesis, introducing the concept of social capital, but focusing especially on habitus. This concept has considerable bearing on the research because life narratives illustrate whether respondents' family and class background have influenced how they have become theatregoers. Further in this section, and to complement Bourdieu's quantitative survey of cultural consumption, I consider Lamont's (1994 [1992]) qualitative research into boundary work. Her study is of particular importance as it examines the nature and properties of symbolic boundaries, and provides a key starting point for considering how respondents in this research perceive such boundaries.

Finally in this chapter I outline the current debate on social change through mediatization and globalization that is a central issue in the thesis. Some theorists, like Morley (2000), draw attention to the continuing importance of locality in people's lives, while others, such as Urry (2000), maintain that mobilities now take precedence and that community can be experienced in imagined or virtual ways. I consider especially how Putnam (2000) has developed the concept of social capital to emphasize the importance of trust in building community. I focus on his analysis of interpersonal and electronic communication processes to provide a significant part of the explanation for those interactions that impact upon community formation both at theatre performances and in everyday life. Here, too, I draw on Goffman's (1990 [1959]) work on interactions in everyday life and show how it relates to Putnam's argument.

This thesis, then, combines elements from the classical tradition of the study of community with recent debate about local and global culture and community. To illuminate the particular concerns about the effects of mediatization and globalization on local community, I draw together especially Williams's ideas on culture and class,

Cohen's, Bourdieu's and Lamont's work on symbolic boundaries, and Putnam's review of the nature of interpersonal and electronic communication. I begin with a discussion of how community study in sociology has moved from local to global considerations, focusing on its approach to the effects of social change.

From Local to Global

The impact of social change on community has always been one of sociology's central concerns. As I have indicated, it is a central theme in this thesis, and discussion of earlier social change provides key insights into processes of community formation and the constitutive features of community. In his book on Émile Durkheim, Nisbet observes that the theories of the major sociologists at the end of the nineteenth century were "caught up in the momentous changes that were the consequences of [the Industrial and French Revolutions]" (Nisbet 1965:19). He describes these changes as follows:

> In strictly social terms, the major consequence of the two revolutions was undoubtedly the increasingly rapid transformation of society from one in which the centuries-old unities of extended family, community, and religion had traditionally been the governing realities in human life to one in which more individualistic, contractual, and money-oriented relationships became dominant. (Nisbet 1965:21)

There was a tendency for social organization to change from face-to-face groups interacting with a common purpose, which was the basis of their formation, to individually arranged contracts. The former typifies traditional community and the latter a new form of social organization that is, by implication, less fulfilling in human terms.

Tönnies' (1955 [1887]) famous typology refers to community based society as 'gemeinschaft' and to contractually based society as 'gesellschaft'. It is this typology that Durkheim elaborates in *The Division of Labour in Society* (1960 [1893]): 'mechanical solidarity', based on face-to-face community and external repressive laws, becomes 'organic solidarity', based on interdependence and juridical rules. As Merton observes in his essay on Durkheim in Nisbet's book, "Historically the movement has been from mechanical to organic solidarity, though the former never disappears completely" (Merton 1965:106). This suggests that face-to-face

community is perennial; that it continues to occur at both individual and societal levels. In this thesis I explore differences between face-to-face community and newer kinds of social organization, such as imagined and virtual community, which have emerged as the product of recent social change. I examine how important face-to-face community is to people and whether newer forms of community are less fulfilling in human terms.

The classical tradition of community study provided a significant impetus for ethnographic community studies in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century. These studies were concerned to overcome the 'great divide' between community based and contractually based society by examining the nature and extent of each typology in the locations they studied, and were similarly interested in social change and its effects on face-to-face community. They are epistemologically related to the anthropological tradition and are forerunners of the recent methodological focus on ethnography. Their significance for this thesis is through their epistemological approach and because they consider the importance and nature of face-to-face community as well as the consequences of newer kinds of community formation. Young and Willmott (1957), for example, found that community spirit in Bethnal Green arose through "ties of kinship and friendship that connect the *people* of one household to the *people* of another" (198-199, emphasis in original). However, in 'Greenleigh', a new housing estate, the extended family had been eroded, and new buildings and occupational and geographical mobility proved unable to foster that same sense of community spirit. Their study thus highlights the importance of interpersonal interaction to community and finds that the social change of the time eroded such fulfilling relationships.

More recent community studies have followed through this tradition of research. I discuss here Newby's (1985) work on changing patterns of rural life in East Anglia, since in this thesis I show how urban and rural contexts affect theatregoing experiences. In considering how social change has impacted on rural community life, Newby finds that farmers and farm workers tend to support rural development, while newcomers from the towns try to preserve what they see as rural charm. In turn, newcomers seek to restrict the tourists they see as threatening to the

character of the village. Social change in rural areas has thus brought about conflict between farming communities and newcomers, and between newcomers and tourists. Newby's work shows how social change can produce conflict, encouraging the formation of opposing communities and at the same time establishing boundaries between them. In this thesis community formation and boundaries are constantly recurring themes, and to examine them in greater depth I discuss below Cohen's more anthropological work on their nature.

Cohen's (1985) theory of the symbolic construction of community and his (1986) ethnographies of British cultures extend our understanding of communities and boundaries through his exploration of their constituent features. While he still focuses on geographically bounded communities, he also highlights their symbolic aspect, "as existing in the minds of their beholders" (1985:12). This idea foreshadows later concepts of imagined communities, which many writers suggest are a feature of mediatized and globalized society, and which this thesis examines as a possible source of community for theatregoers. Cohen indicates that within communities people share symbols, although he stresses that they need not necessarily attach the *same* meanings to these symbols: "a similar sense of things" (16) will suffice. People may express membership of the same community, yet "assimilate it to the idiosyncrasies of their own experiences and personalities" (Cohen 1986:13). Thus he draws attention to diversities within communities. Cohen (1985) also argues that boundaries themselves may be symbolic. This idea is critical in the thesis because the social change addressed here is mediatization and globalization, where the spatial and temporal boundaries of traditional face-to-face community have been eroded. Theoretical and empirical work on symbolic boundaries is discussed further in the sections on Bourdieu and on globalization.

Having reviewed the sociological issues of community informing this research, I indicate here how the thesis builds on this tradition. First, it looks at a different aspect of face-to-face community than do studies of geographically bounded community. The thesis examines audiences that are ad hoc, spatially bounded, co-present groups while attending theatre performances. I argue that the temporary nature of such groups, coming together in a common purpose, develops our

understanding of processes of community formation. Second the study builds on theoretical works on the impact of recent social change on community by offering empirical research into the issues raised. It seeks to understand not only face-to-face community but whether and how individual audience members experience community outside the boundaries of the theatre performance in the wider mediatized and globalized world. In the next section I move on to consider Raymond Williams's ideas on social change, culture, community and class, which bring together the specific concerns of this thesis. His work offers early analyses of the nature of culture and community especially, and I develop these ideas in the thesis.

The Constitution of Community

The major social changes contextualizing Raymond Williams's work are the growths of industry and democracy, which are the same as those addressed by the founding fathers of sociology and discussed above. Together with the idea of culture, these changes comprise the "long revolution" (Williams 1963 [1958]:321,322), and Williams's work thus acts as a bridge between society and culture. Additionally, in the early 1960s, Williams's attention to the concept of culture became "a crucial mediation between literary analysis and social enquiry" (Eagleton 1976:39). These interdisciplinary links are one of the reasons that his work is so resonant in this thesis. In Chapters Two and Three I discuss how Williams's corpus of writing on drama, his concept of 'structure of feeling', and his ideas about changes in media production and technology and their social impact on audiences, are also directly relevant to the project. In Williams's view, the development of the idea of culture is a necessary response to the disintegrating pressures of the Industrial Revolution, stressing the positive function of a society in which individuals are rooted, and the need to think and feel in common terms. For Williams the idea of solidarity is potentially the real basis of society: community is a common culture, which features diversity, complexity, solidarity as the stabilizing element, and continual redefinition (Williams 1963:314). From his perspective culture is a positive response to the destabilization of social change and is the basis of community. I consider below how Williams's ideas on culture are broader based than the cultural consumption discussed in current literature and clarify the approach adopted in this thesis.

Taking up the concern in the thesis about how far cultural consumption is class based, I look here at Williams's ideas on culture and class. Williams suggests that culture can be viewed as a body of intellectual and imaginative work, but it is also and essentially a whole way of life, and this is the primary distinction between bourgeois culture and working class culture. The crucial distinguishing element is not language, dress or leisure, but alternative ideas of the nature of social relationships (Williams 1963:311). Bourgeois culture is the basic individualistic idea whereas working class culture is the basic collective idea (313). Williams focuses on working class culture, since he is doubtful whether 'bourgeois culture' is a useful term. His doubt stems from the view that the intellectual and imaginative work handed from generation to generation is more than the product of a single class, and is also from different time periods (307). For Williams, therefore, community is based on collective social relationships rather than on the cultural consumption of a particular social class. In this thesis I approach theatregoing as one possibility in the array of cultural consumption choices open to people, rather than as an aspect of culture based on class.

Elsewhere, Williams recognizes the possibility of cultural consumption across classes, questioning whether there is any "easy and absolute distinction" between 'high' and 'low' culture, between 'art' and 'entertainment': "For, in fact, we do not live in these neatly separated worlds. Many of us go one day to a circus, one day to a theatre; one day to the football, one day to a concert" (Williams 1976 [1962]:111,112). In the thesis I examine respondents' overall cultural consumption and activities to see how wide-ranging they are. Williams's view foreshadows recent research in America suggesting that middle class people are "cultural omnivores". They are eclectic in their cultural consumption rather than simply highbrow or bourgeois (Peterson and Kern 1996). Such middle class omnivorousness is qualified by research into musical tastes, suggesting that these are linked to occupational status groups (Peterson and Simkus 1992). This pattern is backed up by Bryson's (1997) analysis, which indicates that Americans with lower levels of education tend to be univore in their musical taste. The denial of strictly bourgeois tastes in Williams's work, and more recently the idea of the cultural omnivore, contrast with Bourdieu's analysis of his large-scale survey in France in the 1960s, in which he links cultural

consumption closely to class gradations. In the next section, therefore, I discuss the significance of Bourdieu's work for this thesis, with a particular focus on family and class background and cultural consumption.

A Matter of Background

While Cohen recognizes the existence of symbolic boundaries, as I have indicated above he continues to emphasize spatial relations. Bourdieu, however, argues that people can feel distinct from others through the symbolic boundaries of their cultural consumption. For him these boundaries are underpinned by class rather than by place (Bourdieu 2000 [1979]). Bourdieu details the consumption patterns of all social classes and their subdivisions. Since theatre audiences are the focus of this research, discussion here concentrates on what Bourdieu has to say about the tastes in theatre of different social classes. Following this I introduce the concept of social capital, which is developed in the next section through Putnam's (2000) work. More importantly at this point, I focus on Bourdieu's idea of habitus, which is a key concept in my later discussion of respondents' life narratives. Finally a consideration of Lamont's (1994 [1992]) comparative study of upper middle class 'boundary work' explores the constitutive features of symbolic boundaries, which the thesis also examines in relation to theatregoing practices and experiences.

In linking cultural consumption to class tastes, Bourdieu distinguishes between 'boulevard' and 'experimental' theatre. Boulevard theatre offers "tried and tested shows" to a bourgeois audience. Experimental theatre "flout[s] ethical and aesthetic conventions and appeals to young intellectuals" (Bourdieu 2000:234). The "dominant fractions" dress up, buy expensive seats at expensive theatres and choose a play with no 'unpleasant surprises' or 'lapses of taste'. Intellectuals, on the other hand, "expect the symbolic profit of their practice from the work itself, from its rarity and from their discourse about it (after the show, over a drink, or in their lectures, their articles or their books)" (270). Here is an example of 'distinction' between theatregoers of different class backgrounds and, indeed, age groups. The thesis examines whether these links between class and taste hold true for the respondents, or whether there is greater fluidity of boundary in both class and taste. As an analytical concept, distinction emphasizes the boundaries that delineate the tastes of one group

of people from those of another. These boundaries are exclusive just as much as they are inclusive. People can share tastes or feel distaste for the cultural consumption practices of others. They can also feel excluded from groups to which they think they do not have access. The thesis discusses inclusion and exclusion throughout, with regard to theatregoing as a cultural consumption choice, and theatregoers' experiences at performances and in everyday life.

In Bourdieu's theory, once cultural tastes and practices become part of a person's repertoire, they can be accumulated as cultural capital. Social capital, or the value of social networks, can be similarly amassed. For Bourdieu both of these are on a par with economic capital, with all the suggestions of power that this infers. His concept of habitus accounts for how people acquire cultural tastes and practices. He describes it as follows:

> The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes. (Bourdieu 2000:170)

As Robbins (1991) comments on Bourdieu's position, "To a very large extent we do not choose our identity. We receive the cultural identity that has been handed down to us from previous generations" (174). Habitus is thus the cultural framework through which people learn to appreciate or dislike what is available for cultural consumption, and the emphasis in Bourdieu's analysis is on family and social class as major influences. Any discussion of habitus is therefore closely linked to socialization and life narratives. I examine these ideas in the thesis, to see how far respondents' cultural tastes and practices are acquired through family and class, as Bourdieu suggests, and how far other influences play a part.

Lamont's (1994) study of upper middle class culture makes an important contribution to the work Bourdieu began in a number of ways. First, her research is qualitative, which complements Bourdieu's large-scale survey; second it is comparative between France and America; and third she develops the idea of symbolic boundaries by considering their nature and properties. From qualitative interviews Lamont examines her respondents' subjective descriptions of their

boundary work through their feelings of hostility, indifference or sympathy (xvii). This provides a gauge of the extent of their sense of community or exclusion. Her comparison of France and America enables Lamont to suggest that boundary work varies not only with cultural resources, but also with structural situations, such as job stability, and the characteristics of society, for example ethnic diversity (129). She points out that national cultural repertoires, like the ideology of 'Americanism', also influence boundary work (136). A further development of this is to examine the salience of global cultural references in symbolic boundary work, and my research considers how far theatregoers look beyond local and national theatre to the global scene.

In terms of the nature and properties of symbolic boundaries, Lamont finds that they can be weak, like cultural boundaries in America where there is cultural diversity and tolerance, or strong, like the exclusive cultural boundaries in France, which result from a long tradition of high culture (178). She also indicates that symbolic boundaries are perceived differently by the excluders and the excluded. She says,

> It is interesting to note that while males never mentioned females when probed on feelings of inferiority and superiority, female professionals and managers often discussed males. This finding supports the view that symbolic boundaries are experienced differently by individuals depending on which side of the divide they stand. (80)

Additionally, subjective boundaries, especially strong ones, have the potential to become objective boundaries, leading to actual exclusion. In the discussion of the data I explore further the properties of weak and strong boundaries, and the dynamics of boundary perception.

By stressing boundary work and exclusion, Lamont focuses on inequality. As she says, her study "could as well have been framed as a study of inclusion and the making of communities, the two processes happening simultaneously" (12). There is a greater focus in this thesis on inclusion, because the research yielded particularly inclusive experiences, as later discussion of the data shows. Recognizing the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in processes of community formation however, issues of exclusion are addressed where they arise from the data. In particular these

issues refer to theatregoers' own backgrounds, practices and cultural consumption choices, their views of how theatregoers are generally perceived, and their ideas about people who have other enthusiasms.

In proposing a research agenda, Lamont emphasizes the role played by boundaries in identity formation and their impact on inclusion and exclusion. Boundaries can indicate salient domains of identity, for example whether cultural domains take precedence over gender or citizenship (190). In the following quotation Lamont summarizes her concerns with boundaries, shared identity and symbolic community. Her research focuses on

> individuals who have at their disposal common categorization systems to differentiate between insiders and outsiders, and common vocabularies and symbols through which they create a shared identity. Interviewees who share such categories can be considered to be members of a same symbolic community even if they have no face-to-face interactions. (15)

The question of whether people can feel part of a community even though they do not meet underpins much recent work on globalization and community, and is discussed in the following section.

Local and Global Community Experience

In this section I return to the issue of the impact of social change on community, addressing recent concerns about the effects of globalization. First, I indicate the significance of Anderson's (1991 [1983]) ground-breaking ideas on 'imagined' community. This leads into recent debate about how far it is possible to experience community in an increasingly mediatized and globalized world, which is one of the central concerns of this research. Urry (2000) suggests a paradigmatic shift in how we view society to take account of the growth of mobilities. Morley (2000), on the other hand, argues that while globalization reconstitutes locality, a sense of belonging and feeling part of a unit that is called 'home' still matter to people. As mentioned earlier, Putnam's (2000) development of the concept of social capital is introduced into the discussion, and I consider especially his assessment of interpersonal and electronic communication processes. I draw on Goffman's (1990) work on everyday interaction, showing how it supports Putnam's ideas on interpersonal communication.

In the thesis, this kind of interaction is critical in terms of providing significant explanation for how community is formed.

Anderson (1991 [1983]) argues that all communities beyond the face-to-face are imagined. His work relates the growth of national consciousness to the spread of newspapers.

> [The nation is] an imagined political community . . . [It is] *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (6, emphasis in original)

If newspapers heralded an awareness of national identities, Anderson's argument can be extended to support the growth of imagined communities with bases other than nationalism, and allied to the recent rapid growth in communication technology. Indeed the nub of Urry's (2000) argument is that we should downplay the idea of the nation-state and the notion of 'society', and focus instead on global mobilities. These mobilities can be corporeal, imagined and virtual, and in his "More new rules of sociological method" (18,19) Urry says that we need "to examine [their] extent, range and diverse effects" (18). Do they, for example, supplant traditional face-to-face community? The other "new rule" that is especially relevant to this research is concerned "to illuminate the increased mediatization of social life as images circulate increasingly fast and with added reach so as to form and reform various imagined communities" (19).

Urry suggests that the components of mobilities, "such as maps, cars, trains, paths, computers and so on, powerfully reconstruct the relations of belonging and travelling" (132). He describes "different kinds of 'communities', most of which do not involve geographical propinquity" (142). These are "loose sociations", and examples are self–help groups, direct action organizations, leisure groups and voluntary organizations (142). Imagined communities can evolve from the various mobilities Urry defines. He supports the idea that electronic communication can produce close ties between geographically dispersed groups, and suggests that it "can diminish or even eliminate older forms of identity based upon territory" (177). People can think of themselves as 'members' of networked and mediated

organizations such as Greenpeace or fan clubs. Even though they may not join these organizations, they can identify with them. Consumerism supports such imagined membership when people buy 'global' goods like T-shirts, CDs and videos or use the Internet (185).

Citing Rheingold's (1994) work on virtual community, Urry says he "apocalyptically elaborates on how social life, once organized within national societies, is now moving to virtual communities that transcend each society and their characteristic communities, solidarities and identities" (Urry 2000:73). Urry takes up the debate on whether virtual communities are 'real' communities. He points out that virtual communities may be fragile and ephemeral, lacking the substance of co-present communities, since many of their members 'lurk' in cyberspace, reading messages but not posting any (75). Another consequence of mediatization, Urry suggests, is that the 'public sphere', as elaborated by Habermas (1989 [1962], 1974, 1987, 1992), has become a 'public stage', where the mass media "alter the very possibilities of interaction and dialogue" (Urry 2000:180). 'Personalities' are brought into the home through an informal style of television, and people feel they know them as individuals. Such quasi-interaction produces "new ways of conceiving of self and identity and generate[s] fundamentally new performativities" (180).

The influence of the mass media in people's homes is one of Morley's main concerns. In his recent work exploring the media, mobility and identity (Morley 2000), he says,

> We live in homes in which television and other media bring hostile and threatening images and messages from the outside world into the private world of the household. At the same time, they give us access to the wider world of shared or imagined communities through which we construct our feelings of security. (129)

Morley questions how much mobility there is and for whom. Recent reports note that

> while . . . people in the UK often now do live further away from their relatives than they did in the past, it seems that nonetheless the majority still live within one hour's journey time . . . [and] . . . over half of British adults live within five miles of where they were born. (Morley 2000:14)

There are class differences in mobility. Migrant workers have long sought work away from their homelands, whereas the recent increase in mobility is often among the affluent, for business or leisure (200).

In emphasizing the local, Morley suggests that processes of globalization are expressed through the transformation of locality rather than through mobility. There is a "routinized process of consumption of images of distant places" (14). Also, however mobile people become, "some sense of home often remains as the 'sacred' or central location, from which they still map and measure their advances and travels" (40). Finally, like Merton's observation regarding mechanical solidarity, a sense of belonging and the need to be part of a unit that is called 'home' or 'homeland' "refuses to fade away" (211). This tendency suggests that local community remains important to people. How far this holds true is one of the central issues addressed by the research.

Moving on now to Putnam's (2000) development of the concept of social capital, he first sets out his view of its constitutive elements.

> [S]ocial capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called "civic virtue". The difference is that "social capital" calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. (19)

From this I would like to highlight the phrase "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" as a useful description of the concept of 'community', and to draw on this when discussing social capital among the research respondents. It is clear that some form of interaction among individuals is paramount, and Putnam discusses the cases for and against both electronic and face-to-face interaction in terms of their encouragement of the growth of social capital. I focus first on Putnam's arguments on the potential advantages and disadvantages for community of electronic communication. They are potential because he feels it is too early to assess the effects of the rapid growth of Internet use for example. He recognizes "that neither the apocalyptic 'gloom and doom'

prognosticators nor the utopian 'brave new virtual community' advocates are probably on target" (171). Community, communion and communication are all related; social capital is about social networks; and the Internet is "the network to end all networks", removing as it does barriers of time and distance (171). Through the Internet information can be shared, leading to an increase in 'intellectual capital'. The Internet also facilitates shared interests, which are not based on shared space. An example relevant to the thesis is theatre websites, where information and comment on productions can be accessed. On some of these websites people can post and share their own ideas and views. Putnam suggests that virtual communities may be more egalitarian than real communities, because there is less background information available about the participants (172). In summary, Putnam says,

> [T]he potential benefits of computer mediated communication for civic engagement and social connectedness are impressive. The Internet offers a low-cost and in many respects egalitarian way of connecting with millions of one's fellow citizens, particularly those with whom one shares interests but not space or time. (174)

However, Putnam argues, there are a number of drawbacks to this optimism. First, the 'digital divide' refers to the social inequality of access to cyberspace: élite networks may become less accessible to the 'have-nots' (174,175). Another fundamental issue is that computer mediated communication produces less non-verbal information than face-to-face interaction. Non-verbal messages in face-to-face encounters include facial and vocal expressions, gestures, postures and movements. Such messages are significant in generating emotions, cooperation and trustworthiness (175). These, too, are the messages that Goffman (1990) refers to as "given off" in interpersonal interaction, complementing "given" communication or talk. Through both these means individuals "manage" the information they impart (14 et seq). Additionally, from Putnam's (2000) argument, face-to-face interaction produces a depth and speed of feedback that is impossible in electronic communication (175). Summarizing this issue, Putnam says,

> The poverty of social cues in computer mediated communication inhibits interpersonal collaboration and trust, especially when the interaction is anonymous and not nested in a wider social context. Experiments that compare face-to-face and computer mediated communication confirm that the richer the medium of communication, the more sociable, personal, trusting, and friendly the encounter. (176)

A further disadvantage of computer mediated communication is the high level of specialization on the Internet (177). Interaction here is typically single stranded, whereas real world interactions often force us to deal with diversity:

> Serendipitous connections become less likely as increased communication narrows our tastes and interests – knowing and caring more and more about less and less. This tendency may increase productivity in a narrow sense, while decreasing social cohesion. (178)

Putnam considers that it is much too early to know whether the Internet will become "predominantly a means of active, social communication or a means of passive, private entertainment" (179). Finally on this matter he says,

> [I]t is a fundamental mistake to suppose that the question before us is computer mediated communication *versus* face-to-face interaction . . .[T]he early evidence on Internet usage strongly suggest[s] that computer mediated communication will turn out to *complement*, not *replace*, face-to-face communities. (179, emphasis in original)

Discussing respondents' use of mediatized and electronic communication, I consider especially the issue of how far it complements their face-to-face interaction. In the following conclusion I draw out the major issues arising from this discussion of social change and community that are addressed in the research.

Conclusion

Continuing the work of the founding fathers of sociology and ethnographic community studies, the central focus of this thesis is on how recent social change in the form of mediatization and globalization has impacted on face-to-face community. My approach to this is to consider a group of theatregoers whose practices include co-present attendance at theatre performances, but whose everyday lives in the wider society take place in the context of mediatization and globalization. I examine the nature of face-to-face community and whether and, if so, why it does have a perennial quality. The concepts I employ in the course of this include the idea of a common purpose, notions of 'home', and social capital. Through social capital I focus on interpersonal communication, social networks, reciprocity and trust. In considering the possibility of new ways of experiencing community in present day society, I explore how mobile respondents are and whether they do feel part of imagined or virtual communities. If they do, I examine whether the experience is as fulfilling as

face-to-face community, and if not then why not. In the course of this I assess whether new kinds of community replace or complement co-present community.

In order to understand further the nature of community, I take up Bourdieu's (2000) idea that cultural consumption is class based. I examine whether respondents' consumption of theatre is founded on class gradations according to the kinds of theatre they enjoy, or whether there is more fluidity of boundary for both class and taste. Fluidity gives some purchase on how much diversity is acceptable within community. Of bases of social division other than class that affect cultural consumption, gender is considered in Chapter Two. Age is discussed in the chapters on the research data, in relation to Bourdieu's classification of older "bourgeois" and "young intellectual" theatregoers. Bourdieu's concept of habitus informs my assessment, through their life narratives, of how far respondents' tastes and practices arise from the cultural frameworks readily available through family and class, or whether other influences are involved. I also examine respondents' overall patterns of cultural consumption and their other activities to see how far their practices are in line with ideas of middle class omnivorousness and the lower class univore.

As Newby (1985) found in his study of urban influences on rural communities, boundaries are formed through conflict, and I consider the processes through which this can occur. In addition, although it is not a major focus of this thesis, since it arose as the research evolved, I outline how community based on cultural consumption differs between rural and urban contexts. Exploring further Lamont's (1994) findings on symbolic boundaries, I look at their properties to see how strong and weak boundaries are formed, and consider how strong boundaries might lead to actual exclusion. Finally, respondents' perception of boundaries facilitates an understanding of whether they do move according to where a person stands. In approaching these issues drawn from ideas on social change and community, Chapter Two discusses how the study of audiences can illuminate an understanding of community, focusing especially on modes of sharing.

CHAPTER TWO

MODES OF SHARING: AUDIENCES AND COMMUNITY

Introduction

In this chapter I show how the study of audiences can shed light on an understanding of community, and examine epistemologies, theories and empirical works that pave the way for this thesis. First, I outline the constituent features of audiences that enlighten the study of community. The emphasis here is on what audiences share, and this takes up the idea of a common purpose that is the basis of traditional face-to-face community, as discussed in Chapter One. The focus on sharing in this section includes an exposition of audience response and its use as an indicator of community experience. I then highlight basic differences between audience experiences for live and mediatized performance to give some initial purchase on how these differences underpin different kinds of community. My exploratory research (Hayes 2002) suggests that there is potentially a multiplicity of communities among theatre audiences, and I explain the basis of this conclusion. Finally in this section I reiterate the need to consider inclusion and exclusion simultaneously, and highlight the importance of focusing on communication practices among audience members to gain an understanding of processes of community formation.

Before continuing with specific theoretical and empirical studies of audiences, I next outline changing paradigms in audience research, describing the overall shift from a textual focus to one on audience context, and showing where the present research is situated. I also discuss recent epistemological concerns about how ethnographic audience research can usefully be conducted. These concerns provide a framework in which to consider the empirical audience studies reviewed in this chapter, and a reference point for the methodology of this research, which is presented in Chapter Four. The focus on audience context is followed up through a discussion of Fish's (1980) theory of interpretive communities, which has been influential in literary audience studies and proved helpful in my exploratory sociological research into theatre audiences. I suggest how the concept of interpretive communities can be extended to enable an understanding of theatregoing communities both at performances and in everyday life. Contributing to the debate as to whether there is any difference between art and entertainment, the cultural

consumption of interpretive communities and communities of fans is examined to see how it relates to theatregoers' practices.

The review of earlier audience studies that are forerunners of this research includes works that develop Fish's theory, and other major research that also focuses on audience context. These studies range from theoretical works to empirical and ethnographic research. In assessing their significance for this thesis, I highlight their theoretical frameworks, methodologies and contribution to the study of community. The studies reviewed extend across both live and mediatized audiences, and here, drawing on the views of both theorists and arts practitioners, I further discuss differences between these kinds of audiences and their bearing on community experience. Finally in this chapter, I follow the trajectory from audience experience at performances to its resonance in everyday life by examining the possibility of changes in audience perception, and considering their influence on processes of community formation. Here again I draw on both theorists' and arts practitioners' ideas. I begin by outlining the constituent features of audiences that enlighten the study of community.

Sharing and Communicating

Sharing and the pursuit of a common purpose are major aspects of community, and shared identity has already been mentioned as a constituent in Lamont's (1994) work discussed in Chapter One. What audience members also share, and which contributes to the construction of identity, is their interest in genres and the performance they are watching. Audience response is also shared, and it is important to distinguish here between the laughter and applause, and many other forms of response, shared at live performances, and reactions to performances, or ideas and opinions, that are shared subsequently, after the performance and in everyday life. Both these forms of communication can underpin community. Audience response at live performances represents shared meanings between actors and audience and among audience members. The ideas and opinions that are shared with others face-to-face or electronically after performances and in everyday life similarly influence community formation. There have been a number of observational studies of laughter and applause. Atkinson (1984) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) studied applause at

political meetings, and noted how it tends to build through contagion. Similarly, Jefferson's (1979) work on laughter in everyday interaction shows how an individual can 'invite' laughter by initiating it. It is important to problematize the idea of meanings as always being shared and encouraging community. Often they are not shared, leading to conflict, the drawing up of boundaries and exclusion. For example, a theatre performance might be poorly received by the audience, leading to shared meanings among audience members, but feelings of exclusion from the actors performing the play. My exploratory research suggests that audience response is a good indicator of the dynamics of community. When respondents talked about their own response and how they perceived audience response as a whole, it encouraged them to discuss how involved in or excluded from specific performances they felt.

Theatre audiences are only one form of live performance; others are music, stand-up comedy, opera and ballet. Mediatized audiences include those for film, radio, television, video, DVD and CD. Audience members for these media can watch or listen to performances in small groups, for example a family watching television, or in larger groups at the cinema, and response can also be shared both at the time of viewing and afterwards. Looking now at some basic differences between live and mediatized audiences, an important feature is that a live audience witnesses a unique performance and it is, of course, co-present with the performers. A significant aspect of the mediatized audience, however, is that the *same* production can be watched at different times and in different places. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) refer to this kind of audience as 'mass'. Much recent audience experience, they suggest, is inextricably intertwined with everyday life, and they describe this experience as 'diffused'. In their discussion of the diffused audience as an imagined community, they say,

> For Anderson and Cohen the imagined community has *some* spatial and temporal location . . . The diffused audience, however, as an imagined community, is to a much greater extent, though not entirely, freed from the constraints of space and time; members of the diffused audience can be imagined from any time and, even more, from any spatial location. (117, emphasis in original)

This thesis examines individuals' audience experience at live performances and compares it with their experience of mediatized production as members of both mass and diffused audiences.

My earlier work on theatre audiences (Hayes 2002) explores the ways in which it is possible for their members to experience community. I suggest that theatregoers can feel part of a multiplicity of theatre audience communities: at the performance, outside it, and imagined. At the performance itself there can be different interpretive communities; outside the performance there are face-to-face communities of theatregoing groups; and there are many ways in which mediatized and electronic communication can encourage a sense of community, for example through publicity or websites.

It is important to emphasize two ideas about community that have already been mentioned in Chapter One. The first of these is that the dynamic of community formation and re-formation always involves exclusion as well as inclusion. The second is that communication practices are a vital element in the construction of community. From the above discussion it is clear that for audiences communication can take place in a variety of ways. At a theatre performance, for example, there is communication between performers and audience as the action unfolds, and among audience members as they share their response. Outside the performance there is face-to-face communication in both small, informal groups and the larger, more organized groups that form to attend the theatre. Mediatized communication can take place through newspapers, radio and television, and electronic communication can occur through telephone discussion with friends, emails and websites. Theatre audiences are discussed in depth in Chapter Three. The next section of this chapter considers how we can understand community through audiences, outlining changing paradigms of audience research and highlighting recent epistemological concerns about audience ethnography.

Context, Complexity, and Collaboration

Here I give an overview of audience research for the purpose of indicating the paradigmatic situation of this thesis.[1] Early audience research took place at the time of the growth of the mass media and was dominated by concerns about their effects on viewers. An example of this type of work is Himmelweit, Vince and Oppenheim's (1958) study of the effects of television violence on children. This theoretical framework was superseded by the incorporation and resistance paradigm, which highlighted the idea that audiences could be active in agreeing with or rejecting the messages received through the media. Morley's (1980) *Nationwide* studies exemplify this work. The most recent paradigm is put forward by Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) and described as spectacle and performance. This framework emphasizes that audiences continually form and re-form their identities in the mediascape of everyday life. Everyone is an audience all the time, and often a performer as well. The paradigmatic positioning of this thesis, therefore, counters the view of the audience as victim of the mass media, as propounded by the effects literature. It takes up the idea of active audiences by examining audience response and changes in perception and, further, it considers how audiences form identities and communities in everyday life as well as at the performances they attend.

In recent years there have been a number of concerns about how to employ ethnographic methods effectively in audience research. Along with the changing paradigms described above, these concerns have involved shifts away from positivist approaches and from a focus on texts. My research methodology takes account of such matters and is detailed in Chapter Four. Among the authors discussing audience research methodology, Moores (1993) acknowledges the importance of Bourdieu's large-scale quantitative survey, which gives a general picture of consumption patterns. However, like Lamont, he emphasizes the need for ethnography to understand the production of meanings in the complexity of everyday life. It is important, he says, to consider the "day-to-day settings and dynamic social situations

[1] Comprehensive reviews of audience studies can be found elsewhere. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) particularly address changing paradigms, and Moores (1993) is especially useful for his discussion of methodology.

of consumption" (5). Other writers also stress the need to take into account audiences' social and cultural contexts. Bird (1992) refers to the "lived reality" of audiences (254), and Jensen and Pauly (1997) emphasize understanding "social worlds" as well as "textual content" (157).

In methodological terms, Bird advocates collaborative interviews that encourage conversation, thus invoking audiences' own terminology (254). She also highlights the value of "life histories, autobiographies, self-descriptions . . . [and] diaries" (253). Jensen and Pauly stress observing everyday lives and gaining insight into audiences' views and understandings (164,165). In their critique of Fish's (1980) theory of interpretive communities, Jensen and Pauly say that while he indicates that interpretation is a social act, 'community' is not explored.

> To consider the audience an interpretive community is still to locate people through texts rather than through the social processes by which texts influence and engage people in actual circumstances. (Jensen and Pauly 1997:158)

They suggest that time is spent in the field exploring the social processes of interpretive communities through witnessing audiences' collaborative interpretation of texts (165). Yet, as I have indicated, Fish's theory of interpretive communities has been influential in literary audience studies, and helpful to my earlier research. In the next section I consider his theory, suggest how it may usefully be extended, and discuss similarities and differences between interpretive communities and communities of fans.

Art and Entertainment

Fish's theory (1980) begins by recognizing that there are interpretive communities that share interpretive strategies for *writing* texts, and that "these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read" (171). In addition, literary institutions authorize textual interpretations. However, Fish says,

> Whereas I had once agreed with my predecessors on the need to control interpretation lest it overwhelm and obscure texts, facts, authors, and intentions, I now believe that interpretation is the source of texts, facts, authors, and intentions. (16)

Fish invests authority in the reader when he says that texts do not have determinate meanings (305), but acquire significance only in the context of the reader (2). Meaning develops "in a dynamic relationship with the reader's expectations, projections, conclusions, judgements, and assumptions" (2). The reader "negotiates (and, in some sense, actualizes) the text" (3). Readers approach texts with interpretive assumptions (200), and "communication occurs only *within* . . . a system (or context, or situation, or interpretive community)" (304, emphasis in original). Interpretive communities of readers are dynamic: there can be disagreements among interpretive communities (338-342), people can move from one community to another (343), and interpretive communities can change over time as "once interdicted interpretive strategies are admitted into the ranks of the acceptable" (344).

My exploratory research on theatre audiences suggests that interpretive communities are ubiquitous among them, since they are found both inside and outside the auditorium and can be face-to-face and imagined. In extending Fish's view of the text, I indicate that there are several bases for interpretive communities. They can focus not only on the text of a particular play but also more widely on dramatists and genres. Further, they can concentrate on particular productions of plays, as some of my respondents' practices show.

Fish's ideas on interpretive communities have arisen within the literary academy and relate to high culture. However, these communities are comparable to communities of fans of 'popular' culture in the ways in which they evolve and, to some extent, in their practices. The processes through which fans form attachments to 'stars' are similar to the ways in which members of interpretive communities become 'aficionados' of their favourite writers (Jensen 1992). In their discussion of fans and enthusiasts, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) indicate there is often a sense of personal narrative in the formation of fans' attachments (128,129), and that they are "relatively heavy users" (130). Jenkins (1992) suggests that fans' "particular mode of reception [is one of] emotional proximity and critical distance"; that fans use a "particular set of critical and interpretive practices"; and that they create "an alternative social community" (278). In these ways communities of fans parallel literary interpretive communities.

In his article on the affective sensibility of fandom, Grossberg (1992) describes fans' engagement with popular texts in a way that reflects Fish's ideas on readers' negotiations with literary texts.

> People are constantly struggling, not merely to figure out what a text means, but to make it mean something that connects to their own lives, experiences, needs and desires. The same text will mean different things to different people, depending on how it is interpreted. And different people have different interpretive resources, just as they have different needs. A text can only mean something in the context of the experience and situation of its particular audience. (52,53)

Further, Grossberg stresses that there is no need to "privilege either the text or the audience by giving one the power to determine the relationship" (53). The similarities between communities of fans and interpretive communities indicate that in terms of the processes of audience engagement there is no firm distinction between art and entertainment. In addition, Grossberg usefully offers definitions of two aspects of affect. He suggests that quantitative affect is the "strength of our investment in particular experiences, practices, meanings and pleasures" (57); that is how much we become involved in our choices of cultural consumption. Qualitative affect, he says, is defined by "the inflection of the particular investment . . . by the way in which the specific event is made to matter to us" (57).

Recent literature on fans (Hills 2002, Sandvoss 2005) looks at individuals' affective involvement and pleasure through a psychoanalytic lens. Also, as this work shows, performativity is an important feature of fans' practices. I discuss these matters further in the next section with regard to Stacey's (1994) study of Hollywood fans. While the focus of this thesis is on community rather than the individual, in my discussion of the data on changes in audience perception I examine differences between fans' and theatregoers' identifications and practices, both individual and communal. In the next section of this chapter I review audience studies that have developed Fish's work, and at other major research that has also concentrated on social context. A consideration of their theoretical frameworks and methodologies highlights their contribution to the study of community and marks out the path leading up to this research.

Paving the Way

The audience studies discussed here are key works that facilitate the construction of the position on audiences for which I want to argue. They range through empirical, ethnographic, and theoretical studies, but all emphasize context and community rather than textual meaning. They assist the comparison in the thesis between live and mediatized audience experience, and then focus specifically on theatre audience contexts. The first studies discussed are those relating to mediatized audiences. Here, Morley's (1980, 1986, 1990, 1992) extensive work on television audiences exemplifies how the shift in focus from text to context proved illuminating for audience studies. I follow this with Baym's (2000) recent study in America of a soap opera online interpretive community, because her work takes audience studies into wider globalized settings and emphasizes not only audience context, but also audiences as communities. The focus on audience community is continued in Stacey's (1994) research into 1940s and 1950s Hollywood cinema audiences. Importantly for the thesis, her work indicates and discusses processes of audience identification. Her study is also closely related to the concerns of this thesis through her focus on female spectatorship and the meanings of cultural consumption in women's lives.

The next two studies reviewed continue Stacey's focus on female audiences and, since they relate to live 'readers', facilitate the comparison between live and mediatized audience experience. Radway's (1991 [1984]) research into readers of popular literature is a milestone in audience studies, focusing initially on an interpretive community and then, through a consideration of audience context, discovering meanings of cultural consumption in these women readers' lives. The review of Kippax's (1988) study in Australia of women as cultural consumers of live performing arts brings together Stacey's focus on female audiences and the live aspect of Radway's study. Her work facilitates the concerns of this thesis with both live audiences and meanings of cultural consumption in women's lives. Finally, Susan Bennett's (1997) theoretical work on production and reception provides a specific focus on theatre audiences. Her concern with audiences in differing contexts is of primary importance to the thesis here, and her ideas on audience response and the interactions at theatre performances are closely relevant in the later development

of this thesis. As indicated above, I begin this review of audience studies with Morley's work.

Morley's (1980) *Nationwide* research focuses initially on the text: its semiotics and how it is encoded. Then, in a similar way to Fish, he concentrates on audiences' active decoding. In a later article, Morley (1990) says,

> [P]roduction is only brought to fruition in the spheres of circulation and exchange – to that extent the study of consumption is . . . essential to the full understanding of production. (29)

In setting up the *Nationwide* research and examining processes of dialogue between text and audience, Morley demonstrates an empirical approach to audiences. This methodology develops more fully into ethnography in his later work on household television audiences, detailing how they interact with texts and with each other, and relating these to class and gender. Morley's work is ground-breaking in its shift from text to context, but there is a need to consider audiences in wider mediatized and globalized settings, and to examine further the processes of community formation.

One study that approaches both these aims is Baym's (2000) research into a soap opera online interpretive community. In the first place, her respondents are individuals and are, in Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) terms, members of a diffused audience. Second, Baym acknowledges that connection to the text is essential, but that

> it offers us an inadequate understanding of what it means to be an audience community . . . we have far too little understanding of the spontaneous interpersonal interaction and social relations that make an audience a community. (Baym 2000: 209)

Her research analyses respondents' communication practices through the messages that are posted to the online discussion group. The majority of this discourse is interpretive and, in a useful development of Fish's theory, Baym describes the constitutive features of interpretive practices. 'Character interpretation' represents a large proportion of the discussion, and frequently takes the form of suggesting what characters should or should not do, or what people themselves would do in those situations. In 'personalization', individuals refer through the drama to their own lives, and share personal experiences with others in the group. 'Speculation',

'collaborative interpretation' and 'informative practices' are also types of interpretation identified by Baym as being involved in the construction of audience community (71-83). There are similarities here with Liebes and Katz's (1993) distinction between referential and critical interpretations set out in their cross-cultural study of the soap opera *Dallas*. In their work, referential interpretations relate to audience members' own lives and suggest emotional involvement. They include discussion of characters' motivations, kinship relations and norms, and moral dilemmas. Critical interpretations refer to the themes and issues in the text, and the structure, genre and conventions of the production. Such interpretations are more cognitive and distant. All of these modes of interpretation relate to what audience members take away from the performances they see, that is to changes in audience perception, and to community through how much they are shared. These matters are discussed further in the last section of this chapter.

An important element of Baym's (2000) online interpretive community is the perceived friendliness of the group. It evolves through the intelligence, wit, humour, acceptance, wish to please and support offered by the participants. "The creation of friendliness . . . is not a given but rather a communicative accomplishment . . . [I]t is something a group *does* rather than something a group *is*" (121, emphasis in original). There are, too, tensions in community where people disagree in their interpretation. As she says, "Shared interest need not mean like-minded" (207). Baym's discussion on the management of disagreement relates to the arguments Putnam raises comparing computer mediated communication and interpersonal communication outlined in Chapter One. She examines the view that disagreement in virtual communities can be exaggerated because it is impersonal, text-only communication with a lack of shared etiquette, while face-to-face disagreement tends to be smoothed over (121). She shows how, through mitigating offence and building affiliation, participants come to see themselves as a friendly group (124-128). Similarly the dystopian assumption that online community is bad for people, because it disconnects them from 'real' local community and is a substitute for their offline lives, is not upheld by Baym's research. Participants' involvement in the group connects to rather than supplants their offline lives and the development of a shared interest is liberating (204-205). Baym suggests that it is important to explore what Press (1996) calls "the

interplay between people's dimension 'as audience' and the meanings, rituals, practices, struggles, and structural roles and realities that make up the rest of their lives" (21). The thesis takes up this suggestion by considering the whole trajectory of theatregoing: what theatregoers bring to performances, their audience experiences, and the impact of these on their communication practices and everyday lives.

Baym's research develops the study of audiences and community through her willingness to engage with respondents' communication practices. Her work contributes to an understanding of interpretive practices, the diffused audience, and virtual community. She examines the construction of community through friendliness, which implies inclusion, and through disagreements, which can either be managed or lead to exclusion. In addition, she indicates the importance of connecting peoples' identities as audience members to their everyday lives.

A study that continues the theme of the mediatized audience, in this case cinema, and also leads into a discussion of women as cultural consumers, is Stacey's (1994) research into Hollywood cinema and female spectatorship. She foregrounds the changes in perception occurring as a result of audience experience, and so acknowledges the importance of relating audience experience to everyday life, as noted above. The study highlights the socio-historical context of cinema audiences, processes of identification with 1940s and 1950s Hollywood stars, and the performativity that ensues in spectators' everyday lives. Stacey's research is based on qualitative data collected from women's own accounts of their memories of cinema visits and their favourite stars. She first outlines spectator identificatory fantasies while viewing films at the cinema. One group includes devotion, adoration and worship of the star. Another involves transcendence, and aspiration and inspiration, where spectators imagine themselves taking on the roles and identities of stars, and also desire to become more like them in looks and behaviour (138 et seq). Stacey then moves on to consider spectators' extra-cinematic identificatory practices. Among the everyday practices they engage in are imitating stars' behaviour and activities, and copying aspects of their appearance (159 et seq). In her conclusion, Stacey emphasizes the diversity of her respondents' processes of identification. This

contrasts especially with the singular nature of identification posited by earlier psychoanalytic models of film theory (170).

While it is not a major focus of Stacey's research, the importance of sharing audience experiences through discussion at work and at home does emerge. Specifically, respondents share appreciation, cultural consumption and, especially, cultural competence in reconstructing stars' images as far as they could through their own resources (194). As well as the importance of sharing, a significant feature of the study for this thesis is its concern with meanings of cultural consumption in women's lives. Stacey especially highlights the importance to her respondents of escape from the deprivations of wartime Britain (94 et seq).

Another study of women as cultural consumers is Radway's (1991) research into readers of popular literature. Her work began as a development of Fish's theory, comparing the interpretive strategies of literary critics with those produced by fans of the genre. In the course of the research, however, through the constancy of respondents' ideas, the focus shifted to women's own accounts of meanings of reading in their lives rather than interpretations of the literature itself. Escape is again a theme: here women are setting aside time for themselves rather than accommodating the demands of others. Reading is, of course, a solitary activity, but the women were aware of the wider community of readers through the bookseller, Dot, her personal recommendations of books and her newsletter. She acts as "a mediator to guide the process of selection" (50). Although respondents met for discussion during the course of the research, Radway's community of readers is, in essence, an imagined community.

Audiences again become the focus in a view of Kippax's (1988) study, which also expands the theme of meanings of cultural consumption in women's lives. Her research aims to explore women's experience as audience members of the high arts, especially live performances of music, opera, ballet and theatre. She examines women's arts' practices in order to understand meanings in their lives and the construction of identity (6). Kippax uses case histories constructed from audience members' personal responses in unstructured interviews, which "were conducted

rather like conversations" (6). She finds that the arts play a central role particularly in the lives of the unwaged women in her sample, and that this is severed from their domestic work and family lives (12). For these women, arts' consumption relates to their self-identity as "intelligent and autonomous" beings, whereas their identity in relation to others is as "wife and mother" for example (13). The sense of worth they experience through the arts, however, is self-recognized rather than acknowledged in public. "There is little chance to make public one's response, except interpersonally to a husband or friend, and there is little chance of discussion or debate" (16). Thus any community experience outside the performance is unlikely. Kippax notes the pleasure and enjoyment women gain from the arts (7), which are tied to emotional rather than rational experience (17). The salient meanings in these women's lives arising from their arts' consumption are excitement, relaxation and escape (18).

For a more focused approach to theatre audiences, it is necessary to consider Bennett's (1997) theory of production and reception. While this is a theoretical work, it provides many examples of productions and performances to illustrate the ideas developed. Fish's theory of interpretive communities and reader-response theory are Bennett's starting points. She particularly develops the idea of change over time in interpretive communities: readings are "identifiable as socially and historically mediated" (50). She says, "Interpretive communities are not stable, holding privileged points of view, but represent different interpretive strategies held by different literary cultures at different times" (40). Bennett illustrates this through the reception history of Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. This play was poorly received in 1958, but by 1964 had become a success, because "the interpretive strategies of the London theatregoing public had been redefined and reshaped by an increased exposure to 'new' drama" (41).

Bennett sets her view of theatre audiences in socio-political and intercultural contexts and concentrates on avant-garde theatre. She gives illustrations of productions and performances throughout the world, assessing their reception in different contexts. In the course of this, she focuses on audience response, which I have suggested is a useful indicator of community experience. Bennett's view is that capacity audiences give spectators the confidence to respond to the performance, and

reaffirm their individual and group identity (131). Similarly, homogeneity of response confirms individual decoding and encourages suppression of counter-readings "in favour of the reception generally shared" (153). These ideas on audience response are important for our consideration of the processes of community formation among theatre audiences. There are other themes in Bennett's book that are also significant for this thesis. On a more sociological level, she sets out the interactions involved in a theatre performance, which underpin her theory of production and reception. In addition she considers the theatregoing experience as a whole. These aspects of her work are foregrounded in Chapter Three. In this section I have reviewed research on both live and mediatized audiences. At the beginning of the chapter, while outlining the constituent features of audiences as communities, I set out basic differences between live and mediatized audiences. There is a need to develop this discussion in order to see how the differences impact upon co-present and imagined community experience. In the next section therefore I draw out such differences and explore them.

Co-present and Imagined Communities

It is important to recognize and understand differences between live and mediatized audiences because the thesis explores theatre audience members' experience of both. In this section I examine these different audience experiences, considering the views of theorists and arts practitioners. Reviewing the basic differences set out in the section on audiences as communities, live performance audiences are characterized by co-present interaction, whereas mediatized audiences can be diffused and feature imagined communities, which are newer ways of experiencing community. Live audiences see unique performances; and these are bounded by space and time. Mediatized audiences, on the other hand, see recorded performances, which are not subject to spatial and temporal constraints. Increasingly, these are not recordings of performances *as if* they were live, but are edited, 'spliced' and constructed (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998:42,60-61).

Exploring further now the views and ideas of theorists and arts practitioners, theatre director Richard Eyre suggests that in the computer age theatre can redress a tendency to depersonalization.

> We swim in oceans of information, surrounded by continents of recorded images and sounds . . . In this context what we hold in our heads – our memory, our feelings, our sense of our own history - becomes more to be cherished . . . the art of theatre is an expression of humanness . . . it [relies] on the scale of the human figure, the sound of the human voice and the disposition of mankind to tell each other stories. A theatre performance is . . . live and . . . unrepeatable, ephemeral even at its very greatest. (Eyre and Wright 2000:10)

This uniqueness promotes a sense of occasion and "of participation in a communal act: you go into a theatre an individual and you emerge an audience" (10-11). In comparing the audience experience of live and mediatized drama, Raymond Williams observes that as dramatic performances extended into film and television in the second half of the twentieth century the occasion of theatre has given way to constant access to drama (Williams 1989b:4). These ideas present the crux of the research, investigating the extent to which the occasion of live performance and the mediatized experience encourage a sense of community.

The "humanness" of theatre performances to which Eyre refers indicates another fundamental difference between the experiences of live and mediatized audiences. Live audiences interact with performers, contributing directly to the production. Mediatized performances are finished products and the audience has no input. In their publicity interviews with journalists, actors are frequently asked whether they prefer to act for stage or screen. An actor in a recent interview says, "My favourite place of all is on stage . . . when I can listen to the audience and play them" (Paton, *The Independent Newspaper*, 31 December 2003).

It was noted above that live performances take place in bounded space. The audience is physically close to the performers, but separate from them, even in more experimental productions such as 'promenade' or street theatre. Mediatized audiences, whether they are individuals, a family watching television, or a group of friends at the cinema, are physically distant from the performers. Social distance from performers is high for both live and mediatized audiences. However, recent trends attempt to reduce this distance: there are directors' and actors' talks after live

performances; soap opera stars are frequently cast in live drama; and, as Urry (2000) has suggested, the media present 'personalities' informally.

If live performance is physically bounded, it also takes place in public space, unlike mediatized performance, which, except for cinema, is experienced in the private domain. Live performances feature some degree of ceremony and require a high level of attention (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998:42-43), whereas mediatized performances are often viewed in the context of everyday routines. People can carry out other activities at the same time as watching television, which is typically a low-attention medium (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998:43, Tulloch 1990:205). Tulloch outlines strategies used by television producers to attract audience attention: close-ups and foregrounding, hailing the audience by increasing the sound, and a friendly style of presentation. Theatre performances also have "interpolating devices" to encourage "attentive focalization", and the element of surprise is employed in both live and mediatized production (206-207).

Raymond Williams suggests that the use of the camera in film and television lends mobility to dramatic forms. For example, where expressionist theatre may use verse to imply heightened experience, in film this is achieved through visual imagery suggesting extensions of consciousness (Williams 1979:209). Williams was optimistic about the potential of the realist project through television drama, finding the reproduction of everyday life on stage awkward and weak (202). He suggests that fulfilment of the naturalist or realist project "demands openness to many conventions rather than reliance on a single one" (210), and that texts are active in new ways through new media, new methods and experimental theatre (Williams1989b:3).

Other writers are more critical of film techniques in relation to audience experience. Harris (1999) contrasts how the camera "directs and controls the gaze of the viewer" with the spontaneous interactions and "episodes of audience participation" taking place during live performance (145). She suggests that in the theatre "the look of the spectator is both freer and more likely to be distracted by [the] surroundings" (145), thus highlighting the importance of venue and staging (75). In a recent article, arts critic Thomas Sutcliffe compares the audience experience of two

productions involving battle scenes, one of them on film and the other in the theatre. He says that computer generated imaging gives film the advantage in representing battles, and that it is primarily a visual medium. However, simple technology works best in theatre, which is more cerebral, and where both production and reception have greater immediacy. Sutcliffe concludes:

> [T]he very best effects [in theatre] . . . have nothing to do with spectacle at all – but arise from the continuing ability of theatre to confront you with human feeling . . . [The production] is dazzling in just the right way for theatre – nothing really to see but a great deal to think about. (Sutcliffe, *The Independent Newspaper*, 9 January 2004)

In contrast with Raymond Williams, McGrath (1996 [1981]) has a pessimistic view of the mediatized audience experience. He suggests that the hostility of the outside world can drive people to retreat into their own homes, where they are "bombarded" by the media's interpretation of reality (88). Theatre, on the other hand, can scrutinize reality and "tell a different story with different values and a different perspective from that received on the television screen" (90). McGrath's ideas are in the context of his concern to develop a socialist theatre capable of producing social change. The possibility of changes in audience perception and their influence on processes of community formation is the subject of the following section.

The Performance and Beyond

Producers of whatever genre, live or mediatized, expect to have an impact on their audiences. The work on interpretive practices already discussed in this chapter (Fish 1980, Liebes and Katz 1993, Susan Bennett 1997, and Baym 2000), provides a starting point for understanding the nature of changes in audience perception, and how they can occur, in literature, television, and theatre. In this section, I consider what kind of changes are possible at live and mediatized performances, whether they emerge in everyday life, and whether they can influence processes of community formation. The discussion of changes in audience perception at live performance takes account of Susan Bennett's (1997) and Raymond Williams's (1979, 1989a) interpretations of the significance of Bertolt Brecht's work in the theatre. This argument leads into a consideration of classic realism on television and how far it led to such changes. Bringing the discussion up to the present, I then review arts practitioners' ideas about the kind of audience changes they would like to effect.

Finally, I assess our understanding of changes in audience perception, and consider how they might emerge in everyday life and translate into processes of community formation.

Bennett (1997) highlights how Brecht's work "foregrounds the audience" (20) through a reactivation of "stage-audience exchange" (21). Brecht wanted a theatre that provoked a "critical" audience, and "with the power to provoke social change" (21). A quotation from Frederic Jameson describes Brecht's technique of *Verfremdungseffekt*:

> The purpose of the Brechtian estrangement-effect is . . . a political one in the most thoroughgoing sense of the word; it is, as Brecht insisted over and over, to make you aware that the objects and institutions you thought to be natural were really only historical: the result of change, they themselves henceforth become in their turn changeable. (Jameson 1972:5, quoted in Bennett 1997:28)

Firm attachments to a common condition and struggle in Brecht's work are confirmed by Williams (1989a:91). Brecht's drama explains and criticizes the world, and audiences come to understand why people are isolated and defeated (Williams 1979:215), but they must then "go home and make [their] own revolution" (218). In addressing the possibility of changes in audience perception, Williams says,

> [Y]ou cannot show transformation within a realist framework unless you introduce the kind of distinction for which Brecht's drama does in fact contain a good precedent, that can perhaps be best put as the difference between indicative and subjunctive modes within the dramatic form itself. (218)

Williams defines indicative realism as a statement of reality, whereas in subjunctive realism there is uncertainty (218). As an example of these modes of realism, Williams discusses the television drama *The Big Flame*. This production begins as an indicative realist drama, reproducing the enclosed world of Liverpool dockers at the time of a strike. However, the play goes further than simply representing the strikers "as winning heroically or as losing tragically", and asks, "If we did this, or this, what would happen next?" The drama thus presents alternative courses of action and suggests ways of moving from the present to the future (219). This distinction lies at the foundation of the television classic realism debate during the second half of the

1970s, which is the subject of the following discussion on mediatized audience changes.

The classic realism debate focused on *Days of Hope*, a television drama representing the years 1916 to 1926, a central period in British working class history. The makers of the film, Allen, Garnett and Loach, hoped to stimulate debate about reformism or revolutionism as a means to working class power (McArthur 1981:296). MacCabe's view of *Days of Hope* is that the past is understood as fixed rather than as a site of present struggle, and that it therefore fails as a progressive drama because knowledge at the end of the film is final, leaving no room for alternative truths or courses of action (MacCabe 1981:298). He draws a distinction between

> the narrative's ability to state a contradiction which it has already resolved, and the narrative's ability to produce a contradiction which remains unresolved and is thus left for the reader to resolve and act out. (312)

The public debate that followed the transmission of *Days of Hope* centred on small matters of fact rather than on any reformist issues (McArthur 1981:296), and there remained a need to probe audience reaction further to discover whether changes in audience perception ensued.

Tulloch's (1990) discussion of the television drama *The Boys From The Blackstuff* takes these issues further. He suggests that television drama is polysemic, and that we need to ask how complex meanings relate to audiences' daily rituals (211). He also highlights the complexity of people's reading formations, which evolve from social and intertextual experience (211). Given these two complexities, Tulloch concludes that "MacCabe's non-contradictory 'unity of position' never exists, either in textual producers . . . or readers" (241). In considering how we can understand changes in audience perception, Tulloch draws on Giddens's (1984) concept of practical consciousness, which enables people to 'go on' and is the ability to 'do'. Further, discursive consciousness is the ability to describe and explain this. In the case of *The Boys From The Blackstuff*, viewers emphasized that the drama "enabled the unemployed to communicate among themselves what hitherto they had

only felt unclearly and individually" (Tulloch 1990:279). Tulloch describes how the drama encouraged practical consciousness to become discursive.

> *The Boys From The Blackstuff*'s alienating shocks made discursive an historical situation where a class's practical consciousness of how to 'go on' . . . no longer made 'common' sense . . . As Giddens notes, knowledgeability is deeply embedded in practical consciousness, and is only given discursive form when individuals are questioned by others about why they acted as they did. *The Boys From The Blackstuff* does that questioning, and, as audience responses indicated, encouraged viewers to be discursive in their turn. (280)

Two important points arise from Tulloch's discussion: the first is that audience views were sought in greater depth than on matters of factual accuracy, and the second is that communication took place between viewers enabling individual changes to become communal. Emphasis in this discussion so far has centred on the possibility of changes in audience perception leading to social and political change. The views of current arts practitioners on the kind of changes they hope to effect through their work lead in the same direction, although they are rather more modest in ambition.

Tony Kushner, however, who wrote the recent plays *Angels in America*, is optimistic about the possibility of social change.

> The people I can speak to are those who, like me, believe that society is transformable . . . I think people are excited by any theatre that's speaking about social issues . . . The real hopelessness is silence. (Kushner, quoted in Eyre and Wright 2000:337)

Theatre director Peter Brook says, "[G]ood theatre can . . . create [the] possibility [of] transforming . . . perceptions . . . What counts for me is the increase of perception, however short it may be" (Brook 1987:232). Rather more generally, the playwright Arthur Miller suggests, "The end of drama is the creation of a higher consciousness" (Miller, quoted in Williams 1973 [1968]:312). Other practitioners stress the importance of debate. An actor in a recent interview says, "[D]rama acts at its best as a kind of arena for debate" (Tennant, *The Independent Newspaper*, 29 August 2003). The value of theatre spaces as meeting places for artists and audiences is mentioned by an artistic director: foyers can be an area of "exchange and debate . . . [and encourage] a sense of community" (Kelly 1995:79). These issues are developed in Chapter Three on Theatre Audiences and Community.

In summary, other than in the studies on interpretive practices discussed earlier, ideas on changes in audience perception have tended to be text based, considering how texts can modify audiences' views about society and their own position in it. There is a desire among some producers to effect social and political change, but they are mostly pessimistic about its likelihood. Audience reaction to texts, whether this is shared with others, and how such communication might reflect processes of community formation require further empirical investigation, as Tulloch indicates in his discussion of *The Boys From The Blackstuff*. This thesis aims to go some way towards addressing this empirical need. The conclusion highlights how audiences can illuminate community and the issues discussed in Chapter One, and indicates further issues arising from the above review of audience studies.

Conclusion

Sharing and the pursuit of a common purpose have been emphasized as important constituents of community. Audiences share interests, which contribute to their shared identities. They share meanings through audience response at performances, and outside these by communicating their ideas and opinions. This again impacts upon shared identity, which audiences then bring to their subsequent cultural consumption. The processes of community formation and re-formation through cultural consumption are thus essentially dynamic. Audience response at live performances is a good indicator of face-to-face community experience, and it is important to take into account Bennett's (1997) ideas on how size of audience and homogeneity of response affect reception. Audiences' communication practices afterwards and in everyday life further suggest how community is formed. Community formation through cultural consumption is not only dynamic but also, since meanings are not always shared, reflects processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Changing audience research paradigms have brought a shift in focus from text to context. Audience context in this thesis means considering audiences' social and cultural backgrounds, emphasizing their active response to texts, and examining how audience experiences relate to everyday lives. Epistemologically, we need to find ways of understanding community that focus on audience members' own terminology. In this thesis life narratives provide an approach to assessing the

importance of Bourdieu's habitus in predisposing cultural consumption practices and, at the same time, uncover audience members' own ways of expressing meanings of cultural consumption in their lives. Further, in order to understand how audience context relates to community, the thesis examines first whether and how people share audience experiences and changes in perception, and then how sharing contributes to processes of community formation and re-formation. Underpinning this is the study of audiences' communication practices, both during performances and in their everyday lives.

Chapter One raised the issue of whether distinctions in cultural consumption are class based or whether boundaries are perhaps more fluid than this. In this chapter, for example, similarities between interpretive communities and communities of fans have been noted in terms of how they evolve, audience engagement, and some of their practices. The thesis explores not only whether upper and middle classes are omnivorous in enjoying popular culture as well as high art, but also whether lower classes are increasingly accessing high culture. Since interpretive communities, in the wider sense in which I have defined them, are potentially ubiquitous among audiences, they offer ample opportunity for empirical investigation. Interpretive communities are represented both at performances and afterwards through face-to-face and electronic communication. An examination of collaborative interpretive practices contributes to understanding how such communities form and re-form. The audience studies reviewed in this chapter also highlight meanings of cultural consumption in women's lives. In the research, therefore, I explore gender as well as class as a basis for distinction and community.

A question posed in Chapter One, which is fundamental to this thesis, is whether virtual and imagined communities are as fulfilling in human terms as face-to-face communities. Baym's (2000) study of a virtual interpretive community provides a good example of how audiences can illuminate these issues. In addition to a close examination of her respondents' communication practices, she addresses issues such as how disagreement is managed in virtual communities, and what the connection is between online and offline lives. Both live and mediatized audience members have the opportunity to feel part of imagined communities. This is especially so for

mediatized audiences, who are mostly spatially and temporally separated from each other. It is also a feature of live audiences to the extent that they can feel part of imagined communities of audiences for national and global touring productions for example, or imagined interpretive communities for productions that they may hear about from others, through the media, or electronically. The issues here are how far audience members do feel part of imagined communities, and how fulfilling this is as a community experience.

Differences between live and mediatized audience experiences underpin and illustrate the contrast between home and mobilities in the globalization debate outlined in Chapter One. The thesis addresses the following questions arising from these differences. Is live performance an example of eroded face-to-face community or is it thriving? Do people seek out live performance and, if they do, why is it important to them? How far are audiences for live performance local, and how far does their experience include wider cultural consumption such as national and global productions? How much do live audience members also access mediatized productions, and what comparisons do they make between these experiences? Is mediatized audience experience as fulfilling as live audience experience, even though this may be in different ways?

The dynamic between individual identity and changes in perception becomes an issue of community when identities and changes are shared with others. The research explores how active and critical audience members are, how they identify with the performances they see, and what changes they experience. It then moves on to examine connections between changes in audience perception and everyday life. Are changes shared and, if they are, how are they shared? Here, following especially Putnam's (2000) theories and Baym's (2000) empirical work, the research focuses on the communication practices critical to an exploration of community formation and re-formation and experience.

The sociological theorists discussed in Chapter One consider social change and its impact on community. It is worth speculating whether and how community can influence social change. In other words, we can look at this issue as dynamic

rather than determinist. The question then becomes whether cultural production can create what Brook (1987) calls an “increase of perception” (232), for example through techniques of subjunctive realism, producing individual changes that are shared in debate, and encouraging communities that have an input into social and political change. Chapter Three focuses specifically on theatre audiences, indicating their resonance for understanding the issues of community raised in these first two chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

RESONANCES FOR COMMUNITY: THEATRE AUDIENCES

Introduction

Discussion in this chapter is in three key areas, through which I show how the study of theatre audiences illuminates issues of community. The first explores theatre as an arena for debate in society, considering especially how the subject matter of drama leads to changes in audience perception as these are described at the end of Chapter Two. I discuss how subject matter reflects the issues and concerns of society and, further, how it raises questions in audiences' minds. An understanding of community formation and re-formation is made possible where audience changes are shared, both through response at performances and in everyday life through discussion and debate.

Second, in a discussion of theatre as an art form, I examine theatre conventions, how they have changed, and the implications of these changes for audience and community experience. Face-to-face community, I argue, is enlightened by examining the interactions taking place at theatre performances between co-present actors and audiences and among audience members. In particular, I emphasize the role of the audience and how, through audience response, it both influences the performance and illustrates the dynamics of community formation and re-formation.

Audience response is itself influenced by theatre places and spaces, which are the subject of the third section of this chapter. Theatre buildings and auditoria are an important part of audience context and contribute to community experience at the whole theatregoing event. The relationship between buildings and community experience was raised in Chapter One in connection with Young and Willmott's (1957) findings that people rather than places engender community spirit. Here I examine more recent ideas from the literature on fans about meanings of place. The differing characteristics of auditoria impact on audience experience at performances, and I discuss these features and their import for community experience.

Raymond Williams's work, especially *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (1973) and *The Politics of Modernism* (1989a) makes an important contribution to all three

of the main sections of this chapter. Accordingly, I draw on this work first in a discussion of his concept of 'structure of feeling', which illuminates an understanding of the content of drama. Williams relates content and form, and this contributes to an outline of theatre as an art form. Form then underpins the nature of theatre spaces in Williams's work, and this supports the consideration of theatre auditoria. I begin by discussing theatre as an arena for debate in society, focusing especially on the subject matter of drama.

An Arena for Debate

In Chapter Two I discussed producers' intentions and expectations regarding the kind of changes in audience perception that may be possible. Here I develop our understanding of such changes through a discussion of the subject matter and issues that theatre dramatizes. I focus first on Williams's (1973) concept of 'structure of feeling', which, he suggests, the content of drama reflects, and also on his discussion of questioning and revolt within this content. An exploration of current theatre practitioners' ideas on the subject matter of theatre, and on theatre as an arena for debate further extends the understanding of changes in audience perception, and brings discussion up to the present day.

Williams's concept of structure of feeling grew out of his concern that rational analysis of the separable parts of material life, or a work of art, did not account for the emotional experience that remains over and above that analysis (Williams 1954:21-22). He says it is a structure "because it is firm and definite . . . yet it is based in the deepest and often least tangible elements of our experience" (Williams 1973:10). In relation to a play, for example, there can be rational analysis of the prevailing ideas in the society it depicts, and in the society from which the audience is drawn, but account must also be taken of emotional experiences or, in Williams's terms, the structure of feeling. When I consider audience members' affective identifications in this thesis, I am drawing exactly on this concept of emotional experience.

In his discussion of the content of drama in particular periods of time, Williams (1973) considers the prevailing ideas both rationally and also especially through the concept of the structure of feeling. The subject matter of late nineteenth

century naturalism, for example, included, in the plays of Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov, "crises . . . contradictions . . . [and] the unexplored dark areas of the bourgeois human order of its time" (Williams 1989a:85). Plays such as Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, which "questioned prevailing conceptions of femininity" (85) were denounced as threatening to standards of decency. These dramas, then, not only depicted society at the time, but also questioned it. This theme of questioning in theatre's subject matter continues through Williams's discussion of expressionism and avant-garde theatre. Subjective expressionism, exemplified by Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty', emphasizes "[s]exual liberation, the emancipation of dream and fantasy, [and] a new interest in madness as an alternative to repressive sanity" (87). Social expressionism, as developed by Piscator, Toller and Brecht, which encouraged political activism, renounced the bourgeoisie and affiliated with the working class (88). Williams suggests that in recent avant-garde theatre "[t]he fragmented ego in a fragmented world has survived as a dominant structure of feeling" (93), and "[t]here is still an element of revolt in the challenge to bourgeois society" (93). Thus, some feminist theatre signals a "general revolt" against 'society'; 'subjective' theatre attempts to show authentic individual experience, or its impossibility; and 'social' theatre represents the bourgeois world as domineering, or suggests that change is impossible (93). Avant-garde theatre has always been

> a politics. It has continued to shock and to challenge. It has often illuminated . . . the dislocations, the disturbances, the forms of what are accounted madness, which orthodox society in all its political colours has crudely dismissed. (93)

Thus Williams shows how the concept of structure of feeling is helpful in understanding the emotional experiences that drama from naturalism through to avant-garde theatre presents to its audiences and to which they respond. In this thesis I examine how far these reflections of society and the challenges presented to it by drama actually become questions in the audience's minds, impact on their everyday lives, and, to illuminate processes of community formation and re-formation, how much they are shared.

As well as developing the idea of structure of feeling through looking at the content of drama in particular time periods, later in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, in a

more modernist approach, Williams considers how far playwrights use local language and traditions in their work, reflecting key issues in the societies they depict. He cites Yeats, Synge, Dylan Thomas and Lorca as examples of dramatists who have portrayed local features. Lorca, for example, draws on the life of Spanish country people, national literature, gypsy songs and dance. His work is also in the modern European tradition, using themes of contemporary universal experience belonging to a common world, for example jealousy and revenge (Williams 1973:185-186). Where drama depicts local ways of life and issues and presents universal experiences, both of these offer emotional points of contact with audience members that can lead to changes in perception.

Moving on now to current theatre practitioners' ideas on the subject matter of drama, these confirm what we have seen in Williams's work, that themes can reflect universal experience and can question and challenge society. Richard Eyre suggests that there is an immutability about theatre in the sense that, unlike many other aspects of life, such as technology, its themes are everlasting. They are human themes: the jealousy precipitated by a lost handkerchief in *Othello* can arouse empathy universally and timelessly (Eyre and Wright 2000:13). The themes in Tony Kushner's plays address both universal experiences and contemporary social issues. Kushner writes about

> the lurking fascism in US politics, the effects of the death of Communism, the rise of fundamentalist religions, the spread of AIDS, the cancer of racism: death, hope, fear, and love written in unpredictable stage poetry which slaloms between visionary wit and ardent polemic, and acute pain rubs shoulders with genial farce. (Eyre and Wright 2000:372)

Eyre also indicates the importance of story-telling in theatre, saying that Kushner, Peter Brook, and the French-Canadian director, Robert Lepage, are not "'avant-garde' or 'experimental', but neither are they mainstream or conservative. They simply attempt, like the best art, to make sense of the world" (371). In a BBC television interview, Peter Brook said that a central concern of his work is to explore the human condition, and that theatre must also say something for the times in which it is performed. His recent production of *Hamlet* explores the nature of revenge, and Brook relates this to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the West's

response (BBC television interview, 6 March 2002). Kushner and Brook particularly, then, emphasize theatre's contribution to debate.

Theatre practitioners in Britain see "the social role of theatre as [the] imaginative focus of our concerns" (Mulryne and Shewring 1995:13). Broadcaster and critic Robert Hewison says, "The theatre in Britain still serves as an informal forum in which society meets to amuse itself, and to argue with itself" (Hewison 1995:60). A theatre can be a point of reference in the community, offering cultural and artistic talks and discussions, and involving local people in creative projects. These provide an opportunity for the communication between people that is so essential to the creation of community. I close this section on theatre as an arena for debate in society with three quotations from John McGrath. The first is about the subject matter of theatre, which should not avoid "the major concerns of this century . . . [or] the many-layered struggles of humanity" (McGrath 1996:85). The second refers to questioning, where he says theatre "should be a critical reflection of our lives and encourage debate" (97). The final quotation is about both of these matters and also concerns theatre as an art form.

> [T]heatre is, or can be, the most clearly political of the art forms. Theatre is the place where the life of a society is shown in public to that society, where that society's assumptions are exhibited and tested, its values are scrutinized, its myths are validated and its traumas become emblems of its reality. Theatre is not about the reaction of *one sensibility* to events external to itself, as poetry tends to be; or the *private* consumption of fantasy or a mediated slice of social reality, as most novels tend to be. It is a public event, and it is about matters of public concern. (83, emphasis in original)

An examination of the nature of this public event, and how it has changed, begins my discussion of theatre as an art form, with special emphasis on the role of the audience.

An Active Audience

There is considerable literature on the history of the theatre,[1] but my focus in this thesis is on theatre audiences. Here I give a brief outline of the literature on theatre

[1] See especially Schechner (1988). Macintosh (1993), Bennett (1997), and Eyre and Wright (2000), previously cited, also provide excellent historical outlines.

conventions for the purpose of indicating how the expectations of performers and audiences have changed in recent times.[1] Such changes in expectations have led to modifications in theatre conventions that are especially significant for the study of audiences as communities. I consider how theatre, and other kinds of live performance, differ crucially from other art forms. 'Liveness' and the role of the audience in live art are examined, drawing on Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) theory of audiences, Susan Bennett's (1997) work, and theatre practitioners' ideas. I then discuss the sociological interactions underpinning theatre production and reception, using Bennett's theory as a starting point, and bringing in further ideas from Read (1993) and my own exploratory research (Hayes 2002). Finally, Williams's relation of content to form shows how dramatic convention has changed over time. Williams's exposition underpins the changes in theatre conventions outlined at the beginning of the section, and serves to develop the ideas on how audience expectations and experiences have also changed.

Writing in 1973 on the links between theatre and society and on the conventions of performance, and drawing on Goffman's (1990 [1959]) work on the presentation of self in everyday life, Elizabeth Burns observes that social behaviour can often be analysed "as more or less skilled performance" (Burns 1973:355). At a play, she notes, the social occasion is doubled. There is the social occasion proper, that is 'going to the theatre', and within this social occasion the "realization of the play in which fictitious characters take part in fictitious situations in a fictitious world" (351,352). Describing the interactions taking place at a theatre performance, Burns identifies those occurring among the actors, which are part of the fictitious world of the play, and those between actors and spectators, where there is an implicit agreement that the actors are allowed to "conjure up" (352) this fictitious world. She says, "the actors 'in character' behave as if the spectators are invisible" (352). As I discuss later in this section, and Williams's work shows, this is a description of naturalist theatre, where the audience becomes the 'fourth wall'. More recent

[1] Early work on theatre conventions can be found especially in Burns (1972) and also in Goffman (1990 [1959], 1975). For more recent expositions, see Bennett (1997), Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) and also Hayes (2002).

dramatic conventions encourage audience involvement in the development of the play, and it is especially important to this thesis that audience response is recognized as part of the unfolding of the drama. This, I will argue, facilitates an understanding of how community is formed and re-formed both in the theatre and in everyday life.

In his chapter in *Frame Analysis* on the theatrical frame, Goffman (1975) similarly underplays interaction between performers and audience. He suggests that it is only among the actors that interaction in the form of "direct replying response" takes place. "The audience", he says, "responds indirectly, glancingly, following alongside, as it were, cheering on but not intercepting" (127). Goffman calls this relationship between performers and audience 'frame' rather than interaction. Again, I would suggest that this is influenced by the dominant naturalist theatre conventions of the time, and that interaction between actors and audience is now recognized as a much more significant feature in the development of the performance.

Bringing the discussion of theatre conventions up to the present time, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998), in contrast to mass and diffused audiences for mediatized productions, refer to live audiences as "simple" audiences (Chapter 2). They are bounded by space and time, "involve a degree of ceremony and ritual" (41), and the "rules of behaviour are fairly circumscribed" (41). These features underlie the temporary and ephemeral nature of theatre. Peter Brook argues, "The one thing that distinguishes theatre from all the other arts is that it has no permanence" (Brook 1977 [1968]:144). Each performance is unique, as indeed, I would argue, it is for other kinds of live performance. However, Brook says that the theatre audience "assists" the performance, which relies on human interaction for its development. "[I]n the theatre the audience completes the steps of creation . . . until an audience is present the object is not complete" (142,156). I would develop this by suggesting that theatre audiences differ from other live audiences in that they influence the performance to a greater extent than audiences for other live arts. While there is certainly dialogue at a rock concert, interaction between performers and audience at a classical music concert, ballet or opera tends to be mostly through applause and expressions of approval at the end of a movement or the whole work. Stand-up comedy is more like political meetings in that rhetoric is much in evidence to exert a

degree of control over audience response (Atkinson 1984, Heritage and Greatbatch 1986, Rutter 1997). There are thus different modes of dialogue between performers and audience at different kinds of live performance. Like Brook, Bennett (1997) highlights the role of the audience at theatre performances. In comparing theatre audiences with readers of literature and cinema audiences, she says,

> The literary, as well as the filmic, text is a fixed and finished product, which cannot be directly affected by its audiences . . . In the theatre every reader is involved in the making of the play . . . No two theatrical performances can ever be the same precisely because of this audience involvement . . . The theatre audience is, like its cinematic counterpart, also a social gathering. Reading is, by and large, a private experience. (20-21)

In discussing the essence of theatre, before developing his ideas on the interplay among actors, audiences and architecture, Iain Mackintosh (1993) points out that communication in the cinema is all one way, but

> [t]heatre is different. Despite the production having been precisely prepared by the director, both audience and actor find themselves in a situation which is essentially anarchic. Anything might happen. If all goes well the event will 'take off' . . . The sense of danger, of community and of shared experience felt at a successful theatrical occasion is what distinguishes live theatre from cinema. (2)

It is clear that the role of the audience is essential to theatre as an art form. Theatre audiences have the potential to experience community at an event that is bounded by space and time through interaction with the performers and also each other.

Further to my argument above that audiences are a vital part of the interactions that constitute theatre as an art form, I here propose that by exploring these interactions sociologically we can begin to see how the study of theatre audiences can enlighten our understanding of community. The interactions support the communication that is necessary for the formation and re-formation of community. In her theory, Bennett (1997) indicates that it is "the interactive relations between audience and stage, spectator and spectator which constitute production and reception" (139). Thus, interactions between actors and spectators, and among spectators, have the potential to produce a sense of community. This can be shown through the audience response that both influences the actors in their performance and indicates shared meanings among spectators (Hayes 2002). Read (1993) suggests

that in theatre performances there is a ‘tripartite’ relationship among self, performer and the rest of the audience (90), and this is a useful way of looking at the individual responses and changes in perception that precede sharing them and community experience.

Considering now Raymond Williams’s ideas on dramatic form and the audience, he also acknowledges the audience’s vital role when he says, “The spectator . . . is the one element the dramatist cannot control, in any form” (Williams 1973:318). Although dramatists do try to structure audience response through their texts, it is not always forthcoming at expected places, and sometimes it occurs where it is unexpected, as any comedy actor would testify. Relating content to dramatic convention and the role of the audience, Williams indicates that in naturalism the emphasis is on the creation of accurate settings and lifelike rooms (Williams 1979:204). Speech and action is that of everyday life, and naturalism preserves the illusion that the actors, as characters, are unaware of the audience’s presence (Williams 1973:4). That is, as discussed above in relation to Burns’s and Goffman’s ideas, the audience is complicit in accepting the ‘fourth wall’. The content of expressionist and experimental theatre, however, requires a form and stage that “captures a wider social and historical experience than the naturalist limitation to the single playing space permitted” (Williams 1979:203). Changes in dramatic conventions brought changes in theatre playing spaces. Thus the ‘box’ set behind the proscenium arch in naturalism gave way to ‘open’ stages for expressionist and experimental theatre. These different kinds of playing space, of course, affect audience response and community experience. When Williams says “One can never in the end define form without defining the actual productive relationship within which it is generated” (Williams 1979:223), this suggests not only the crucial role of the audience in theatre as an art form, but also the context of the production and reception relationship in terms of playing space. The focus in the thesis on audiences in different playing spaces develops the literature on theatre and dramatic conventions discussed in this section.

Before turning to consider theatre buildings and auditoria as part of the context of theatre production and reception, I draw on Eyre’s (Eyre and Wright 2000)

summary of theatre's strengths. Theatre will survive, he says, by stressing its unreproducible elements: the virtues of its liveness and uniqueness; its ability to ravish the eyes and ears and enchant the soul; its unique dependence on human form and voice; and its support of our ability to tell and listen to stories (378). I suggest that theatre's potential for encouraging a sense of community through being part of a live audience and through changes in audience perception also contributes to its strength.

Places and Spaces

The importance of audience context to an understanding of community has been stressed throughout. For theatre audiences this includes not only features of their social background, such as class and gender, and their theatregoing life narratives, but also the theatre buildings and auditoria where they see performances. These can be expected to have a significant impact on the dynamic of community formation. By way of contrast to Young and Willmott's (1957) conclusion that people rather than places engender community spirit, I look first in this section at some of the ideas from the fans' literature suggesting that place is significant in the construction of their affectivity. I then focus on theatre buildings and the whole theatregoing event, drawing on the work of Harris (1999), McGrath (1996) and Bennett (1997). Following this I look at ideas on auditoria, particularly Mackintosh's (1993) work on the interplay among architecture, actor and audience, and Brook's (1977) views on desirable playing spaces.

Couldry (2000) indicates the emotional importance that fans attach to place, and Sandvoss (2005) gives a useful review of the significance of place and its part in the construction of fan communities. Through Durkheim (1976 [1912]) he highlights the sacred aspect of place, drawing a religious analogy with fandom, which constitutes ritual, pilgrimage and regularity of consumption. Sandvoss suggests that fandom is a realm of identity that is additional to religion, rather than supplanting it, because in fandom there is no other-worldly framework. He argues that

> fandom best compares to the emotional significance of the places we have grown to call 'home', to the form of physical, emotional and ideological space that is best described as *Heimat*. (Sandvoss 2005:64)

Drawing on Morley (2000), Sandvoss describes how the idea of *Heimat* relates to fandom, identity and the construction of community: "[*Heimat*] is one's place in the world, in which place and community become an extension of one's self, and the self is a reflection of place and community" (Sandvoss 2005:65). In this thesis I examine whether people are paramount to the construction of community, as Young and Willmott (1957) indicate, and also how far place is significant, as Durkheim's work and discussion in the fans' literature suggest. Below I turn to theatre buildings and auditoria to show how they impact on community experience.

Theatre buildings are imbued with the history of when and where they were built, and the productions that have taken place in them. The journey to a theatre, its exterior structure and its history contribute to the overall theatregoing event. In her study Harris (1999) suggests that a focus on text and performer can deflect from the impact on the audience of venue and staging (75). She notes that interpretations of live performance are influenced by factors such as which performance spectators see and where they sit (4). From his experience of touring with his own theatre company, McGrath (1996) outlines the whole theatre event as follows:

> For not only must the text, *mise-en-scène*, lighting, performances, casting, music, effects, placing on the stage all be taken into account in order to arrive at a description of the stage event, but also the nature of the audience, the nature, social, geographical and physical, of the venue, the price of tickets, the availability of tickets, the nature and placing of the pre-publicity, where the nearest pub is, and the relationships between all these considerations themselves and of each with what is happening on stage. For when we discuss theatre, we are discussing a social event, and a very complex social event, with a long history and many elements, each element also having a long and independent history. (5)

Bennett (1997) echoes this when she says, "The many components of theatre – director, actor, theatre building, lighting, seating, and so on – intercede between text and reader" (20-21). She describes the elements of the "gathering process which are bound to influence the spectator's preparation for the theatrical event" (125). These include planning to attend the event, the purchase of tickets, travel to and location of venue, type of venue – whether multipurpose or designated solely as a theatre, theatre architecture and design of the interior, particularly at this point the atmosphere of the box office and foyer. Foyers, often interconnected, are the scene of facilities such as

restaurants and bars; and in them the small groups that attend a performance "are deliberately assembled as a collective" (130). My point here is that all these elements contributing to the whole theatre event are potential sources of community formation and re-formation.

Perhaps the single most important element in this aspect of theatre audience context is the nature of the auditorium. The following quotation from Hewison (1995) suggests how theatre audiences can experience community in a variety of different playing spaces:

> [The audience] is a temporary community, reaching out to embrace the community of the artists on the stage. That sense of community can be created in many ways: shivering in the rain at a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Open Air Theatre in Regent's Park, roaring out the responses at a Christmas pantomime, mingling with the actors in a promenade performance, sitting in judgement on the characters of Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*. (60)

There is much debate about the virtues and drawbacks of different kinds of auditorium, but the main characteristic theatre practitioners seek is that it should be conducive to audience response. This encourages communication between actors and audience, and among audience members. It also promotes the possibility of changes in audience perception. It is important to note that audience response is not necessarily manifest, and this relates, of course, to genre. As Brook (1977) says, "[T]he audience that answers back may seem active, but this may be quite superficial – true activity can be invisible" (144). I consider now some of the characteristics of auditoria and their potential for conduciveness to audience response.

In terms of the size of the auditorium, some theatre practitioners suggest that atmosphere is more important than size. "A space that holds only two hundred and fifty can feel barn-like. One that feels intimate can to your surprise seat eight hundred" (Attenborough 1995:89). Actors can make large spaces seem intimate by their technical mastery; but in smaller spaces they feel free to use their emotions and imaginations to the full (Jacobi 1995:110). However, a very small space can increase the self-consciousness of the audience (Alexander 1995:82). In general Mackintosh (1993) thinks that larger auditoria are not better because some spectators can be too

far away. "Smaller theatre spaces . . . have always proved more successful for creative theatre than larger auditoria" (171). What is most important in theatre architecture, he feels, "is the channelling of energy from actor to audience and back again" (Mackintosh 1995:117).

Mackintosh (1993) agrees that seating capacity can be misleading, arguing that audience density is important (171); and I have already noted Bennett's ideas on the advantages of capacity audiences in Chapter Two. Similarly, Eyre (Eyre and Wright 2000) considers that "there has to be a critical mass of people in an auditorium for a 'state of theatre' to exist" (321). The nature of this critical mass varies with the size and shape of the auditorium. He gives examples of theatres that have a similar seating capacity, arguing that one of them tends to produce "dismal" theatre, whereas the other produces theatrical "detonation" (321). A consideration of some of the other features of auditoria can further our understanding of why this might be.

It is useful to look at the shape of the stage and auditorium in terms of horizontal and vertical planes, and audience members' awareness of each other. The virtues of different auditorium designs in the horizontal plane have been the subject of endless debate (Mackintosh 1993:135). Proscenium arch stages were superseded by Tyrone Guthrie's introduction of the open stage between 1948 and 1953. This reduced the framing effect and focused the audience on the stage. Spread around three sides of the stage, spectators became more aware of each other and of the collective nature of the event. The logical extension of the open stage is theatre in the round (Hewison 1995:54). Bearing in mind our concern with the interaction between actors and audience, from the actors' point of view in a theatre in the round the position of command is dead centre, and anywhere else is dynamically weak. A rectangle gives a more flexible acting space, and it is instructive that Shakespeare's Globe Theatre has a circular auditorium but a square stage (Dudley 1995:98).

The vertical plane of auditorium design has received less attention than the horizontal plane, but many theatre practitioners feel that tiers and galleries draw audiences together (Mackintosh 1993:135; Reardon 1995:25). The proportion of the

audience above and below the actors' eyeline is a helpful indicator of how the vertical plane works in a theatre. Mackintosh (1993) suggests that half the house above and half below the eyeline is ideal. If the audience are all above this line they are in the dominant position, and it is difficult for the actors to engage them (136). Conversely, if the actors are above most of the house, it is difficult for the audience to feel involved in the performance.

The development of the open stage and the desirability of tiers and galleries suggest that it is important for audience members to be aware of each other in order to encourage a sense of communal participation in the theatre event. Open stages do allow this, and it is interesting to remember that Elizabethan, Georgian and Victorian auditoria all had a wrap around design that incorporated tiers or galleries, which also enabled audience members to see each other. Indeed Mackintosh (1993) indicates that "the requirements of live and reciprocal communication [in theatres] have changed little over the centuries" (161). The horseshoe auditorium, typical of the Victorian theatres designed by Frank Matcham, is particularly conducive to awareness of other audience members and to audience response.

> In the old Frank Matcham theatres laughter runs around the audience like wildfire because the side boxes conduct it. Those boxes are crucial . . . It's such a pity that the horseshoe, and centuries of experience, should have been neglected. (Dudley 1995:98)

Even though Matcham theatres can be large, up to a seating capacity of one thousand eight hundred, one famous actor's view is that

> in a Matcham house you can stand centre stage and almost reach out to the whole of the audience, because Matcham has wallpapered the auditorium with people, and you feel at complete ease with the whole of the house. (Ian McKellen, quoted in Barnes and Chapman 1995:102)

These Victorian theatres are thus very conducive to interaction between actors and audience and among audience members. Below I consider how the director Peter Brook approaches his selection of performance space to maximise community experience at the theatre event.

Peter Brook experiments with space and environment, and is very particular about where his productions are performed. He has adapted the Bouffes du Nord theatre in Paris as a centre for his work, and he converted the old tram factory, maintenance depot and museum in Glasgow into the Tramway Theatre for his production of *The Mahabharata* there in 1987. As he says, "[A] beautiful place may never bring about explosion of life, while a haphazard hall may be a tremendous meeting place" (Brook 1977:73). It is important to consider "what it is [in theatre space] that brings about the most vivid relationship between people" (74). In his search for optimum conditions of contact among actor, space and audience, Brook applies four basic rules. These are set out succinctly by Neil Wallace, who was Programme Director at the Tramway Theatre at the time of Brook's production there. Actors and audience must be in the same space, with the first row of the audience at the same level as the stage. The space should be large but essentially intimate, and the character of the environment should contribute to the theatre experience (Wallace 1995:62). Undoubtedly theatre buildings, and particularly auditoria, play a very important part in audience context and the dynamic of community formation. In the conclusion I draw out how the study of theatre audiences is especially resonant for issues of community.

Conclusion

The study of theatre audiences is instructive for issues of community in three key areas. The first of these is through theatre as an arena for debate, especially the subject matter of drama and the changes in audience perception it can produce. The second area arises from the active role of the audience in theatre, and the third from the contribution that theatre buildings and auditoria make to audience context.

The subject matter of theatre often reflects issues and concerns in society and invokes universal human themes and experiences. It can also question, encouraging changes in audience perception. In this thesis I examine how these changes occur and how they are shared, both at performances and afterwards in everyday lives, giving important insights into processes of community formation and re-formation. On the face of it, this seems little different from how cinema and television might also produce such changes, but I suggest that the nature of the live audience experience

heightens the potential both for changes and for community formation and re-formation.

This heightened potential emanates from the co-presence of actors and audience members at a theatre performance. The thesis focuses on the dynamic of community formation through the interactions taking place between actors and audience and among audience members. These interactions are manifest through audience response, which influences the performance and indicates shared meanings between actors and audience and among audience members. Audience response and community experience are affected by differences in playing spaces and theatre buildings, and this is the third area where the study of theatre audiences is especially helpful to understanding issues of community.

Theatre buildings and auditoria are an important part of audience context, and contribute to the dynamic of community formation at the theatre event. In this thesis I explore the meanings to people of theatre buildings and their histories, and consider how different characteristics of auditoria, such as size and shape, affect audience response. The whole theatregoing event provides many possible sources of community experience.

These three areas, changes in audience perception, the interactions between performers and audience and among audience members, and the contribution to audience context of theatre buildings and auditoria, offer an opportunity to explore processes of community formation and re-formation, and are at the centre of this thesis. In Chapter Four I describe the origins, methodology, and story of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ORIGINS, METHODOLOGY, AND STORY OF THE RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter is a bridge between the issues of community raised in the first three chapters and the discussion of the data in the chapters that follow. The main issues I am addressing in this thesis are the nature of community, how it is formed, and how it is experienced in co-present and imagined situations. As I have discussed, my approach to this is through audiences as communities, specifically theatre audiences. Theatre audiences offer the opportunity to explore community in a variety of ways through the whole trajectory of the theatregoing experience. In this chapter I give an overview of my exploratory study (Hayes 2002), and indicate how it has stimulated the further investigation taken up by this thesis. The issues of community raised by both this smaller scale study and the literature review have led me to the qualitative methodology I then discuss. This approach is one that lends itself to investigation of the issues right across the theatregoing experience. Finally I describe in detail the story of the research, reflecting along the way on practical matters, my own position as a researcher, and the ethical issues that arose.

Setting the Scene: Context and Interaction at Blackpool Grand Theatre

My small-scale exploratory research aimed to examine why people continue to attend live performance in an increasingly mediatized and globalized world. The study set out to consider the social context of theatre audiences and to focus empirically on interactions among theatre audience members. This was achieved by looking at theatregoers' backgrounds, overall patterns of leisure activity and their ideas about audience response at performances. The fieldwork was conducted at the beginning of 2000 among audience members at Blackpool Grand Theatre. This is a Victorian theatre, designed by Frank Matcham, which has a horseshoe auditorium and seats one thousand two hundred people. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with twelve members of the 'Friends of the Grand', whose membership of this group indicates that they are keen theatregoers.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, the exploratory research suggests that there is a potential for theatre audience members to feel part of a multiplicity of communities.

This is through sharing social and cultural backgrounds, an interest in theatregoing, tastes in theatre, and interpretive strategies, both during performances and in the wider world. These are face-to-face and imagined communities. Interpretive communities are potentially salient among theatregoers, and I have suggested that these can be on a broader basis than a single text or play, including genre, dramatists, and particular productions of plays. Two areas of the interview schedule that proved especially productive were those relating to respondents' theatregoing life narratives, and their affective attachment to the Grand theatre building and auditorium.

My exploratory study indicated a number of avenues of further investigation that are taken up in this research. The enthusiasm with which respondents discussed their theatregoing life narratives suggested that this would be a useful way to illuminate Bourdieu's concept of habitus, and would also access theatregoers' ideas about the meanings of theatre in their lives. Audience response proved a useful indicator of community experience, generally supporting Bennett's (1997) idea that there is a tendency towards homogeneity of response where the audience is at capacity. However, there was some fragmentation of response at more experimental productions and where the audience was markedly heterogeneous. In this thesis I develop the link between audience response and processes of community formation. As well as considering audience members' views on audience response, the research looks at actors' and one director's ideas in order to explore the interaction between performers and audience. I have also broadened the scope of the audience member sample, in that it is drawn from the wider theatregoing population rather than only from theatregoers who are members of 'Friends' groups. The research takes up the suggestion in the exploratory study that the nature of the auditorium influences audience response, and considers community formation in auditoria with differing characteristics. Again following on from a rich seam of investigation in the small-scale study, an understanding of the meanings of theatre buildings and auditoria to theatregoers is developed in the thesis.

In the course of the exploratory study it became clear that there is a need for discussion with theatregoers regarding the extent to which they do feel part of imagined communities, and this, of course, raises all the issues surrounding whether

or not these communities are 'real' communities. One approach is to consider further the differences between audience experiences of live and mediatized performance, and the thesis does this, positioning the research in the debate about community and globalization. In the next section I outline the methodological approach to these avenues of research and the issues of community raised in Chapters One to Three.

Methodology: Context, Complexity, and Communication

Through theatregoers' audience experiences, both live and mediatized, and the meanings of theatre and community in their lives, this research aims to examine processes of community formation, and to consider the extent to which people feel part of communities in new ways in today's mediatized and globalized world. The focus on meanings, processes, and the concept of community requires the generation of rich, qualitative data reflecting respondents' own ideas. A questionnaire seeking only brief replies is inappropriate for these purposes. The methodology of this research is therefore ethnographic, and takes into account the epistemological concerns raised in Chapter Two. It emphasizes theatre audience members' social and cultural contexts, and their own production of meaning. The questions in the semi-structured, qualitative interviews are predominantly open-ended, and are designed to encourage respondents to describe their theatregoing life narratives and audience experiences in their own terminology. I have stressed the importance of the communication practices underpinning community formation. The interview therefore also encourages respondents to describe these in terms of both audience response at performances, and discussion afterwards and in their everyday lives. The interview schedule serves as a guideline, so when respondents raised anything of relevance to the themes of the research this was followed up and discussed. Here the interest in theatre I shared with them proved helpful in that I was often familiar with productions, plays, or theatres they referred to, and could develop discussion with them. Alternatively, where respondents were more reticent, I could sometimes find a relevant area of discussion that did elicit their interests and ideas. In these ways I was able to establish very good rapport with the respondents. I give further detail on the interaction between researcher and respondents in the later section on the interviews.

In order to approach the ideas surrounding the meanings of theatre buildings to people, and the influence of different designs of auditorium on audience response and community formation, the research compares audience experiences at two theatres in the Northwest of England. These are similar in size but different in the shape of their auditorium and stage. Since audience response is a vital feature of the interaction between performers and audience and among audience members, the theatre performances selected for the research are in the comedy drama genre, where response is expected to be overt. This is the genre to which this research relates therefore, and further research is necessary to investigate audience response at performances of other genres, such as history or tragedy. The interviews with the actors and director explore their ideas on audience response, performing in different kinds of auditorium, and the changes in audience perception they hope to achieve.

The research follows the trajectory of theatre audience members' experience, from their history of theatregoing, through experience of the selected performance, and on to their everyday lives, including here especially communication practices and other activities. This is designed to show the meanings of theatre in people's lives, and whether and how they experience community through their theatregoing, and in other ways in their lives. In accordance with this methodology, I describe the story of the research in detail in the section below.

The Story of the Research

First here, I give background to the two theatres. I then outline the plays that are the focus of the interviews, and describe how access was negotiated and the research performances chosen. Here also I indicate my own involvement as an audience member at these performances, and give my observations on the audiences as a whole. Following this I detail how audience members were selected for interview, and give the overall demographic profile and basic theatregoing characteristics of the sample. At this point I include individual respondent profiles. Next I discuss social processes during the interviews, and outline the areas of investigation covered by the semi-structured interview schedules. Finally, I describe the data analysis.

The Octagon Theatre and Theatre by the Lake

Given the requirements that the research should compare theatres similar in size but different in stage and auditorium configuration, and should match productions according to the comedy drama genre, a review of Northwest theatre programmes for 2003 revealed that the Octagon theatre in Bolton and Theatre by the Lake in Keswick were staging plays by Noël Coward in the Spring and early Summer. The Octagon was performing *Private Lives* in March, and Theatre by the Lake introduced *Blithe Spirit* into their repertory season in June. These plays further define the research as relating only to mainstream theatre, and again more research is needed into interactions and audience response at experimental productions. Both research theatres seat approximately four hundred people, but are different in the shape of their stage and auditorium. They are professional regional producing theatres and also receive some productions from other theatres. They both also have a smaller Studio space as well as the main auditorium.

The Octagon is in Bolton town centre and is therefore near to the large conurbation around Manchester. It opened in 1967, and draws its audience predominantly from within a fifteen-minute journey time to the theatre. The Octagon is a theatre in the round, which sometimes uses a 'thrust' stage configuration. The stage is at the same level as the first row of the audience. Actors are auditioned for each production, and the theatre has its own Artistic Director and occasional visiting directors. The programme at The Octagon is mostly drama, with some evenings of comedy, music or poetry. It has a youth theatre, an outreach programme taking drama workshops out to community groups across the region, educational talks and post-performance discussions. The theatre building has a café and a bar, and there are car parking arrangements with the adjacent town centre car park.

Theatre by the Lake lies between Keswick town centre and Derwentwater, and is a focal point for theatregoers from a dispersed rural area. Audiences' average journey time to the theatre is thirty minutes, but theatregoers sometimes come from sixty to ninety minutes' journey time away or more. In addition, about half of Theatre by the Lake's audience is drawn from the tourist population visiting the Lake District. The theatre opened in 1999, next to the site where the travelling Century

Theatre's 'Blue Box' used to present its summer season. Theatre by the Lake has a proscenium arch end-stage with a large 'apron' in front of the arch, and in addition to Front and Rear Stalls there are Side Stalls, Boxes, a Circle and Side Circles. It is effectively, therefore, a horseshoe auditorium. The Front Stalls are below the actors' eyeline. The configuration here can become 'in the round' by exchanging the positions of the Front Stalls and the stage. In this case the stage is at the same level as the first row of the audience. Actors are contracted for the repertory season and take part in several of the plays according to casting requirements. The theatre has both an Artistic Director and an Associate Director. The programme at Theatre by the Lake centres on the repertory season, which runs from June until November, of three plays in the main house and three in the Studio. There are Christmas and Easter productions, and the rest of the year offers an extensive choice of film, music, literature and poetry. Local amateur groups and Theatre by the Lake's youth theatre also perform in both main house and Studio. The youth theatre runs workshops in towns in North and West Cumbria. The theatre has a 'Friends' group of supporters, offers backstage tours, post-performance discussions, and has a café and two bars. Car parking is free in the evenings on the adjacent Lakeside car park. While the requirement that the theatres should have differing playing spaces was the first consideration in choosing the research sites, their contrasting geographical locations, that is the urban context of The Octagon and the rural situation of Theatre by the Lake, also proved instructive in understanding the construction of community. Appendix One shows the locations, buildings and seating plans of The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake. The seating plans give an indication of the shape of the theatres' auditoria. In the next section I give an overview of the two plays, and describe the configuration of the productions. I detail the processes of negotiating access and selecting the research performances. I then give my observations on the research performances and the audiences attending them.

'Private Lives' and 'Blithe Spirit'; Negotiating Access; The Research Performances and Audiences

Noël Coward's *Private Lives* and *Blithe Spirit* are comedy dramas, renowned for their brilliant construction and witty dialogue. They are naturalistic in that *Private Lives* is about the wealthy 'bright young things' in the 1930s and their way of life, and *Blithe*

Spirit concerns the well-to-do professional class in the 1940s. In *Private Lives*, Elyot Chase is on honeymoon with his second wife Sybil in the south of France. By coincidence, Elyot's ex-wife Amanda is also on honeymoon with her new husband Victor, not just in the same hotel but in the adjoining room. Amanda and Elyot meet again across the balconies, run off to Paris together and renew their previous relationship, leaving Sybil and Victor to become acquainted with each other and their joint predicament. The consequences are both disturbing and comic. Noël Coward wrote *Blithe Spirit* as light entertainment during the Second World War. Theatre by the Lake's production had the 2003 invasion of Iraq as background on the world stage, which did not escape the notice of some of the research respondents. In this play Charles and Ruth Condomine invite the eccentric Madame Arcati to lead an after dinner séance. Their amusement fades when Charles's deceased first wife Elvira materializes and, unseen by all the other characters except Charles, attempts to continue her life with him. Madame Arcati struggles to remedy matters as Elvira and Ruth fight to the death.

Private Lives was first produced in 1930 and *Blithe Spirit* had its first performance in 1941. Originally both plays were produced in proscenium arch theatres, since they preceded the development of the open stage. The Octagon performed *Private Lives* in the thrust configuration, and Theatre by the Lake performed *Blithe Spirit* in the end-stage format. It is interesting to note how very frequently Noël Coward's plays, and particularly these two comedy dramas, are revived. In an Appendix to his biography of Noël Coward, *A Talent To Amuse*, Sheridan Morley (1986 [1969]) lists these revivals on a year-by-year basis, noting especially that there was a 'Noël Coward Renaissance' in his own lifetime in the 1960s (148). Nowadays it is almost always possible to catch a production of these plays at a theatre in England. Morley observes that *Private Lives* has

> been almost consistently successful ever since [the first production], a guaranteed copper-bottomed audience-puller that has temporarily rescued countless reps. from the throes of a bad season. (148)

Certainly the subject matter of the plays, especially Coward's treatment of relationships between the sexes, and in *Blithe Spirit* also his light-hearted look at spiritualism, deals with the universal experiences and social issues discussed in

relation to the content of theatre in Chapter Three. Respondents at *Blithe Spirit* also suggested that renewed interest in spiritual matters in recent times could be a reason for its current revival. The extent to which these plays produce changes in audience perception will be seen in the discussion of the data in the following chapters.

My access to The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake was through the Marketing Managers, with approval for the project also being required from the Artistic and Executive Directors. In the event this did not prove too difficult, the main reason for this being that I was able to offer them qualitative interview data, which is the kind of research they seldom have the budget or time to do themselves. It was also very important to stress that when approaching audience members with a view to interviewing them their evening at the theatre would be only minimally distracted. Had this not been the case, it would have been a very good way to lose audiences rather than build them, and so I assured the theatre executives of a researcher 'softly, softly' approach. I also asked whether there were any areas of interest to the theatres they would like me to include in the interviews. In the case of The Octagon, they wanted to learn whether their audiences felt their tickets gave them good value for money, and so I introduced questions on this matter into the interviews. I offered to produce reports for the theatres, which they were pleased to receive, covering the data that were of particular interest to their marketing strategies. I give more detail on the content of these reports and their use to the theatres in the section on data analysis.

After negotiating access to the theatres, a particular performance at each was agreed where audience members could be approached with a view to interviewing them. In both cases these were weeknight performances towards the beginning of the run of the production. At the performance of *Private Lives* at The Octagon, the theatre was seventy-eight per cent full, and at *Blithe Spirit*, Theatre by the Lake was at sixty-five per cent capacity. By chance, typical attendance at each of these theatres is the same as attendance for the research performance at the other theatre. That is, The Octagon normally runs at sixty-five per cent audience capacity and Theatre by the Lake operates at a high seventy-eight per cent. The popularity of the research performance of *Private Lives* can be explained by the attractiveness of the subject

matter to both sexes, and the presence in the cast of a local soap opera actor who had been well received in a previous production at The Octagon. The lower than usual audience capacity at Theatre by the Lake may be explained by it being only early in the tourist season there, and the very difficult circumstances the director and cast were experiencing due to the death of a relative of the leading actress. I attended both performances as a member of the audience. At The Octagon I sat a couple of rows from the back, and at Theatre by the Lake towards one end of the second row of the Circle. From these positions I could see most of the audience as well as the performance. As the performance began I started to take notes on audience response, but very soon became part of that response. My impression of the audience members at *Private Lives*, based on overall observation and on individual conversations as I approached them with a view to a later interview, was that there were more males than is usual at theatre performances;[1] there were very few young people;[2] they were knowledgeable about Noël Coward and his plays; and there were more lower middle class people than I have observed at similar productions elsewhere in England.[3] I base this last observation largely on their modes of speech, their dress, and their willingness to talk to me, although this last factor could be because they were Northern. At *Blithe Spirit*, the gender split seemed more female dominated; there were more young people than at *Private Lives*; the audience was also knowledgeable

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[1] British Market Research Bureau statistics give the national gender split for theatregoers as 60% female and 40% male. (Source: Media Week 20/4/2005)
At The Octagon the overall audience gender split is 70% female and 30% male. (Source: West Yorkshire Arts Marketing Report 2001)
At Theatre by the Lake the overall audience gender split is 65% female and 35% male. (Source: Audience Research Survey, Anthony Lilley 1999)

[2] Target Group Index figures give age statistics for theatregoers nationally as 45% over the age of 45. (Source: Arts Council of England *Roles and Functions of the English Regional Producing Theatres: Final Report* May 2000)
At both The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake overall audience above the age of 45 years is 65%. (Sources as above)

[3] Target Group Index figures give social class statistics for theatregoers nationally as 67% ABC1s. (Source: Arts Council of England *Roles and Functions of the English Regional Producing Theatres: Final Report* May 2000)
Available statistics on social class for The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake are based on employment status only. As discussed later in the chapter, class in this research is based on other characteristics in addition to occupation and income.

about the play; and the lower middle class was in evidence, as at The Octagon. It appeared to me that there were not so many tourists as there would be in the height of the season, and of those who were there, they were British fell-walkers rather than the foreign tourists who attend productions in London theatres. Overall, my impression of both research audiences was that they were regular regional theatregoers. The fact that their class level seemed to me lower middle class rather than upper middle class is in all probability because a theatre ticket in the Northwest of England is more affordable than it is in London and the South East for example. I have made these cultural judgements on the research audiences to indicate their typicality in relation to audiences both at the research theatres and at the national level. The next section describes how the sample was selected by approaching audience members at the research performances, and by arranging to interview actors and the director who was available. Overall demographic details and basic theatregoing characteristics of the sample of audience members are given. Individual profiles of all respondents, that is the director and actors as well as audience members, are outlined in the subsequent section.

Selecting the Sample; Overall Demographic Profile; Theatregoing Characteristics

On the evenings of the selected performances I approached audience members, before the performance and during the Interval, to ask whether they would be happy to give an interview, as soon as could be arranged and in their own homes, about their theatregoing practices and experiences. Introducing myself as an academic researcher as well as contributing to the theatre's understanding of its audiences, I approached, as far as possible, a cross section of theatregoers in terms of age, gender and, taking into account their dress and speech, class. Some were alone, others were couples and in yet other cases I joined a group of people. In selecting the sample, I also tried to include some younger people and males. At Theatre by the Lake I was also concerned to include tourists, at the same time appreciating that it would not be easy to arrange interviews while they were on holiday. If the people I asked to give an interview agreed, I then took basic contact details from them and asked for their occupation and age range. I also noted how frequently they attended The Octagon or Theatre by the Lake, which other theatres they attended, and their favourite theatre genres. The Contact Sheet used is in Appendix Two. I followed up the contacts as

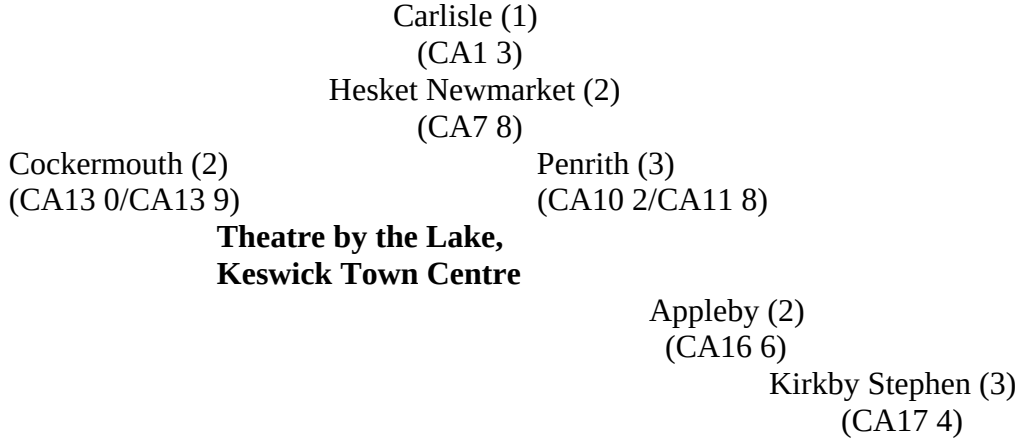
soon as possible after the performance and arranged interviews with them. The majority of the interviews with The Octagon contacts were carried out within three weeks of the performance, and for Theatre by the Lake most were completed within ten days. This is important because one of the sections in the interview schedule asks about the performance and audience response, and so is dependent upon recall.

The Marketing Manager at The Octagon arranged interviews for me with the director of *Private Lives* and two of the actors. The interview with the director was immediately after the performance. This was followed by a director and actors' talk, which I attended, as did two of the audience member respondents. The two actors were interviewed on the following afternoon, when the previous evening's performance was fresh in their minds, and they were able to recall how they felt about the audience and their response. For *Blithe Spirit*, Theatre by the Lake's Marketing Manager arranged interviews for me with two of the actors on the afternoon following the selected performance. All the interviews with the actors took place at the theatres. In addition to the director and four actors, thirty-two audience members were interviewed. Fifteen of these are from the *Private Lives* audience, and all except the respondents from Preston and Royton live within a fifteen-minute journey time to The Octagon. Geographically they completely encircle Bolton town centre, and their residence in relation to The Octagon is shown in the diagram below. Figures in brackets indicate the number of interviewees and postcodes.

FIGURE 4.1: THE OCTAGON RESPONDENTS' RESIDENCE IN RELATION TO THE THEATRE

Seventeen respondents are from the *Blithe Spirit* audience, and four of these are tourists. Two of the tourists were interviewed at the theatre a couple of days after the performance. They came from Stockton on Tees, and Holbeach, Lincolnshire. The other two, who were returning to Liverpool the day after the performance, gave interviews there in July 2003. The remaining thirteen have a journey time to Theatre by the Lake of between thirty and sixty minutes. Of these thirteen, five have always lived locally, and the remaining eight are 'incomers', that is they have moved to Cumbria from elsewhere, usually when they retired. Respondents' residence in relation to Theatre by the Lake is represented below.

FIGURE 4.2: THEATRE BY THE LAKE RESPONDENTS' RESIDENCE IN RELATION TO THE THEATRE



The ethnic origin of all respondents is white British. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show the age range and gender of audience member respondents at each theatre.

TABLE 4.1: THE OCTAGON RESPONDENTS' AGE AND GENDER

Age Range in Years	Number of Female Respondents	Number of Male Respondents
25-34	1	-
35-44	1	-
45-54	2	3
55-64	1	1
65-74	2	-
75 and over	3	1
Total	**10**	**5**

TABLE 4.2: THEATRE BY THE LAKE RESPONDENTS' AGE AND GENDER

Age Range in Years	Number of Female Respondents	Number of Male Respondents
25-34	-	-
35-44	1	-
45-54	6	-
55-64	5	1
65-74	1	3
75 and over	-	-
Total	**13**	**4**

Male points of view are thus represented in the data, although younger people were harder to find, especially at these productions. More sensitive demographic details than the ones requested at the initial contact, such as those referring to marital status and income, were asked at the end of the interview. This Demographic Details Sheet is also in Appendix Two. In the sample, marital status is closely allied to theatregoing companions, and twenty-one of the respondents attended these plays as one 'half' of a couple. There are eight couples in the sample, four from each theatre, where both partners were interviewed. Of the remaining eleven respondents who did not attend as part of a couple, eight attended with female theatregoing groups, one went with friends who are a couple, another attended with her parents, and yet another went alone.

Household income and occupation give an indication of respondents' social class. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 show these characteristics for respondents at each theatre.

TABLE 4.3: RESPONDENTS' HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Annual Household Income	Number of Octagon Households	Number of Theatre by the Lake Households
Under £10,000	1	1
£10,000-19,999	3	3
£20,000-29,999	2	3
£30,000-39,999	-	2
£40,000-49,999	3	-
£50,000-59,999	1	-
Preferred not to divulge	2	4

Of the households that did not divulge income, only two at Theatre by the Lake appeared perhaps rather wealthier than most of the sample. Overall these household incomes do not suggest that respondents are particularly 'well-off', although the number of retired people, ten at The Octagon and eleven at Theatre by the Lake, tends to push income downwards. Table 4.4 gives respondents' occupation, either their current or, if they are retired, their former occupation.

TABLE 4.4: RESPONDENTS' OCCUPATION

Occupation Current/Retired	Number of Octagon Respondents	Number of Theatre by the Lake Respondents
Skilled Manual	1	-
Service Sector	-	3
Clerical/Administrative	3	2
Caring Professions	7	7
Creative/Artistic	-	1
Managerial/Professional	4	4

The number of respondents in the caring professions is notable, and, like the household income data, occupation does not suggest that the sample is an élite group

of theatregoers. I was also able to observe respondents' type of housing when I visited them for interview. This feature has been included in my view of respondents' social class, and is detailed in the individual profiles following this overall demographic outline of the sample. As mentioned above, I also include my observations of respondents' dress, modes of speech, and willingness to talk to me in my judgement of their social class, making it a qualitative basis rather than quantitatively based on occupation and income alone. My overall assessment of the social class of respondents is that they are indeed middle class, but that this does cover a wide range of differences. There is a tendency towards lower middle class rather than upper middle class, and this is especially noticeable among the local respondents at Theatre by the Lake.

Table 4.5 shows The Octagon respondents' frequency of attendance both there and at all other theatres put together, and Table 4.6 gives the same information for Theatre by the Lake respondents.

TABLE 4.5: THE OCTAGON RESPONDENTS' FREQUENCY OF THEATREGOING

Number of Visits to The Octagon per year	Number of Respondents	Number of Visits to All Other Theatres per year	Number of Respondents
Less than 1	1	Less than 1	2
1 - 2	4	1 – 2	4
3 – 4	6	3 – 4	7
5 – 6	2	5 – 6	2
More than 6	2	More than 6	-

TABLE 4.6: THEATRE BY THE LAKE RESPONDENTS' FREQUENCY OF THEATREGOING

Number of Visits to Theatre by the Lake per year	Number of Respondents	Number of Visits to All Other Theatres per year	Number of Respondents
Less than 1	1	Less than 1	2
1 - 2	-	1 – 2	1
3 – 4	10	3 – 4	12
5 – 6	4	5 – 6	1
More than 6	2	More than 6	1

The majority of respondents attend The Octagon or Theatre by the Lake on a regular basis three or four times a year, and this is approximately the same frequency with which they attend all other theatres put together. The fewer number of respondents who attend more or less frequently than this either have extensive experience of theatregoing or are newcomers. Their views draw on the wealth of this experience, or provide detail on the processes involved in developing an interest in theatre. The final table describing the overall characteristics of the sample, Table 4.7, shows tastes in theatre. Respondents were asked about their favourite theatre genres, and the table shows for each theatre the number of times genres were mentioned.

TABLE 4.7: RESPONDENTS' TASTES IN THEATRE

Genre	Number of times mentioned by The Octagon Respondents	Number of times mentioned by Theatre by the Lake Respondents
Classical drama	12	15
Comedy	11	12
Musicals	10	8
Thrillers	7	5
Dance	5	9
Modern drama	4	14
Classical concerts	-	4
Opera	-	3

As expected for the audience sample for these plays, tastes come out strongly in support of classical drama and comedy. The Theatre by the Lake sample shows an interest in modern drama, dance, classical music and opera, rather than the musicals and thrillers mentioned by The Octagon respondents.

Summarizing the overall demographic profile and theatregoing characteristics of the audience member respondents in the sample, they are predominantly female, middle aged and middle class. They attend The Octagon or Theatre by the Lake regularly three or four times a year, with their partners or in female groups. They attend all other theatres put together with approximately the same frequency. Their tastes in theatre show a preference for classical drama and comedy. This is entirely what one would expect of a sample of theatregoers for this type of production, and the data they provide is illuminating about this group of people. There are others in the sample, the men, the one or two younger people, the lower middle class

respondents, and the newcomers to theatregoing, who, in their differences, also shed light on theatregoing meanings and experiences.

Who are the Respondents? Individual Profiles

I include here individual profiles for all respondents, that is the director and actors as well as audience members, so that the reader may become familiar with the respondents providing the quotations in the following four chapters discussing the data. For ease of reference Appendix Three also gives, alphabetically by name, a table of respondents' and their basic characteristics. To preserve anonymity none of the names used are respondents' own. Profiles are outlined here first for the director and actors, second for The Octagon audience members, and third for the Theatre by the Lake audience members. For the director and actors I give details of their experience at The Octagon or Theatre by the Lake, and also of their work in other theatres and other media, such as film, television, radio or music.

Director and Actors: Backgrounds and Experience

Peter, the director of *Private Lives*, has been Artistic Director at The Octagon for four years and this is the seventeenth play he has directed there. He previously worked as an Associate Director also in regional theatre, and as a freelance director in theatres in the Midlands and the North of England. His productions at the Edinburgh Festival in 1999 and 2001 were Fringe First winners, and he has also won awards from *Time Out* magazine and the *Manchester Evening News*. About his approach to directing *Private Lives*, he says he tried "to make this play live and breathe now beyond its entertainment value". He describes the rehearsal period as "difficult, but also one of the most enjoyable experiences I've ever had in the rehearsal room".

Kate, the female lead in *Private Lives*, has worked in theatre throughout England, including the Royal National Theatre. She has performed previously at The Octagon, when she earned a nomination for 'Best Actress' in the 2000 *Manchester Evening News* Theatre Awards. She has also worked in film and television. Kate says The Octagon is one of her "favourite spaces".

Ged, the male supporting actor in *Private Lives*, has also performed at The Octagon before, and at other regional theatres in the North of England and the Midlands, as well as in touring productions. His background in the theatre is classical, and he has acted in several productions for the Royal Shakespeare Company. He has experience of performing in very large auditoria like the Olivier at the Royal National Theatre and the Hackney Empire. Ged has appeared in a number of television series and has extensive radio experience.

Penny, one of the female supporting actors in *Blithe Spirit,* has performed in several repertory seasons at Theatre by the Lake. She has worked extensively in repertory theatre throughout the United Kingdom. She has performed in London West End theatres and has experience of performing in both very small Studio spaces and large-scale musical productions. Penny has several television credits and is also a singer and recording artist.

Nigel, the male lead in *Blithe Spirit,* has acted in three repertory seasons at Theatre by the Lake, and in the Easter production of *Neville's Island,* which was performed in the round. He has very extensive experience of acting in repertory theatre throughout the United Kingdom, and has also appeared in several television series.

The Octagon Audience Members: Demographic Profiles and Theatregoing Practices and Tastes

The fifteen audience member respondents from The Octagon are listed according to the nature of the groups in which they attended *Private Lives*, since this proved a useful basis for analysis. Profiles include demographic data, theatregoing companions, whose names are underlined where they were also interviewed, frequency of theatre visits both to The Octagon and elsewhere, and tastes in theatre. Their experiences of publicity, booking and seating are also included.

Attended as an individual

Jean is a retired family businesswoman as well as being an ex-Wren. She is a very active and alert 80 year old, and lives in a medium size detached house in a well-to-do suburb of Preston. She is married and has two grown-up sons, who are also

married and live elsewhere in England, and several grandchildren. Household annual income is between £20,000 and £30,000. Jean went to *Private Lives* by car on her own, since her husband now has serious mobility problems. They used to go to the theatre regularly as a couple in London, Stratford and Manchester, but now Jean's theatre visits are rare. She likes all kinds of theatre, except perhaps modern drama, and particularly enjoys musicals and ballet. Jean had seen *Private Lives* advertised in *The Independent* newspaper, and she regularly accesses theatre websites. She booked by phone and sat in Stalls A at the back.

Attended as an individual in a group of six females

Jill is a police officer and works shifts. She is in the age range 25-34 years and lives in a mews style house on a new estate in Boothstown. She is married and has no children. Her individual income is between £20,000 and £30,000, and household income is between £40,000 and £50,000 per annum. Jill went to *Private Lives* in a group of six females, which her mother organises on a regular basis. All of them are season ticket holders at The Octagon. Jill also goes to the Opera House and the Palace in Manchester, and particularly likes comedy and musicals. Her mother receives the Octagon brochure and makes all the bookings by phone. For *Private Lives* Jill sat in Stalls B in the middle.

Attended as friends

Helen is a retired primary school teacher. She is between 65 and 74 years old and lives in a medium size semi-detached house in Heaton. She is divorced and has a grown-up daughter living with her. Her individual annual income is in the range £10,000 to £20,000. Helen went to *Private Lives* with a friend, Ruth, with whom she has been going to The Octagon recently on a regular basis, although she would go with another friend if Ruth did not want to go to a particular production. Helen herself goes to The Octagon about six times a year, and also attends Bolton Little Theatre and the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester. She likes all kinds of theatre. Helen is on the Octagon mailing list and so read about *Private Lives* in the brochure. She booked in person at the Box Office, and she and her friend take it in turns to book. For *Private Lives* she sat on the back row of Stalls B, because she has a balance problem.

Ruth is a medically retired civil servant. She is in the 55-64 years age range and lives in a small semi-detached bungalow in Westhoughton. She is divorced, with two grown up children who are married and live elsewhere, and she has two grandchildren. Her annual income is between £10,000 and £20,000. She went to *Private Lives*, with her friend Helen, and this is a regular arrangement. Ruth also attends The Octagon with a friend from London, when he is visiting. She goes to The Octagon about six times a year and also visits Bolton Little Theatre. She likes all kinds of theatre. Ruth read about *Private Lives* in the brochure and her friend made the booking. She sat on the back row of Stalls B because she has multiple sclerosis with its attendant mobility problems.

Attended as a friend with a couple

Alice is a retired secretary and lives in Radcliffe. She is 93 years old and extremely thoughtful both in her own ideas and towards other people. She is a widow, and her son, aged 65, lives with her and looks after household financial matters. Alice usually goes to The Octagon with a couple, Beryl and Charles, although sometimes she and Beryl attend other theatres in Manchester. She visits The Octagon fairly often and her favourite kind of theatre is classical drama. Alice heard about *Private Lives* both by word of mouth and through the brochure. She made the booking for the three of them by phone. They sat in Stalls B on the back row because she has mobility difficulties.

Beryl is a housewife in the 65-74 years age range. She also lives in Radcliffe, in a large, detached house with a large garden. Both house and garden are immaculate. She is married to Charles and they have a son, who lives in London and is married to an actress. Household income is between £10,000 and £20,000 per annum. Beryl goes to The Octagon about four times a year with Charles and Alice, and sometimes she and Alice go to other theatres in the Manchester area, especially the Royal Exchange and The Lowry. Beryl and Charles travel regularly to theatres all over the country with family or other friends. Beryl is particularly fond of classical drama. She heard about *Private Lives* through Alice, who made the booking. They sat in Stalls B at the back.

Charles is a retired architect in the over 75 years age range. He is married to Beryl and shares their detached home in Radcliffe. Their son, married to an actress, lives in London. Household annual income is between £10,000 and £20,000. Charles goes to The Octagon about four times a year with Beryl and Alice, and occasionally attends the Royal Exchange theatre and The Lowry. He regularly visits theatres throughout the country with family or other friends. He likes various kinds of theatre, but is especially keen on classical drama. He heard about *Private Lives* through Alice, who made the booking. They sat in Stalls B at the back.

Attended as a couple, only one partner interviewed

Enid is a retired hospital school teacher. She is in the over 75 years age group. She lives in a medium to large size semi-detached house in Worsley. She is married with a grown up son and daughter who live elsewhere, and several grandchildren. Her individual income is between £20,000 and £30,000, and household income is between £50,000 and £60,000 per annum. Enid goes to The Octagon about four times a year with her husband, and they sometimes go to the Library Theatre in Manchester. They go with another couple to the Royal Exchange Theatre where they have season tickets, and have visited the Swan Theatre in Stratford upon Avon with these same friends. Enid is especially fond of classical drama. She and her husband receive the Octagon brochure regularly and her husband books by phone. For *Private Lives* she sat centrally in Stalls A.

Jack is a National Health Service education officer in the age group 45-54 years. He lives in a medium size semi-detached bungalow on a modern estate in Little Lever. He is married and has no children living at home. He preferred not to divulge his income. Jack has been going to The Octagon with his wife for eight years. They are season ticket holders and attend all the plays in the season. Occasionally they go to the Palace or the Opera House in Manchester. He likes all kinds of theatre. Jack receives the Octagon brochure and books by phone. For *Private Lives* he sat in Stalls A.

Attended as couples, both partners interviewed

Liz is a childminder. She is in the 45-54 years age group and is married to Rob. They live in a medium size semi-detached house in Astley Bridge, and have two sons aged 19 and 18 living at home. Her income is between £10,000 and £20,000 and household income is between £40,000 and £50,000 per annum. Liz mostly goes to the theatre just with her husband, and they go to The Octagon a couple of times a year. They also go to theatres in London, and her preference is for musicals. Rob had brought *Private Lives* to her attention, and she had made the booking by phone. They sat on the front row in Stalls B.

Rob is a property asset manager, in the age range 45-54 years. He lives in Astley Bridge with his wife Liz and their two teenage sons. His income is between £30,000 and £40,000 and household income is between £40,000 and £50,000 per annum. He says he usually goes to the theatre just with Liz, but sometimes groups of about twenty are organised through work for shows in Manchester. They have also attended the theatre as a family. Rob goes to The Octagon twice a year and also to theatres in Manchester and London. He likes musicals and comedy. Rob saw the publicity for *Private Lives* because he works near to The Octagon, he is on the mailing list, and also takes the local Evening News. He says a mailshot on its own can get left in a drawer and forgotten, but the three publicity items together influenced him to go to this production. He sat on the front row of Stalls B.

Susan is a cashier and is in the 35-44 years age group. She is married to David, and they live in a medium size detached house on a modern estate in Sharples. They have four teenage children living at home, a daughter of 19 and three sons aged 17, 15 and 14. Susan's income is under £10,000 and their household income is between £40,000 and £50,000 per annum. *Private Lives* was only Susan's second visit to any theatre, and she said she would always go with her husband. She had previously seen *Blithe Spirit* at The Octagon. Her preferences are for drama, comedy, thrillers and musicals. She had seen the poster for *Private Lives* in Bolton Town Hall and booked in person. Susan sat in Stalls B about halfway up.

David is a building site manager in the 45-54 years age group. He lives in Sharples with his wife, Susan, and their four teenage children. His income is between £30,000 and £40,000 and household income is between £40,000 and £50,000 per annum. *Private Lives* was his first ever visit to the theatre other than to children's pantomimes. Susan had suggested going to *Private Lives* and he thought he would always go to the theatre with her. He feels he has insufficient theatregoing experience to express any preferences for different kinds of theatre. For *Private Lives* David sat in Stalls B.

Attended as a couple in a group of twelve

Karen is a hospital administrator in the age group 45-54 years. She is a widow and has a grown up son who lives elsewhere. She is Jim's partner, but they do not live together. Karen lives in a small semi-detached bungalow on a modern estate in Royton. Her annual income is between £20,000 and £30,000. She and Jim usually attend the theatre with a regular group organised by one of the couples. Occasionally Karen goes with girl friends or her son. She attends The Octagon about four times a year, and also visits the Oldham Coliseum and the Royal Exchange. She particularly likes comedy and musicals. Karen heard about *Private Lives* from the couple who organise the group, and they also make the bookings. For this performance they sat in Stalls B.

Jim is a medically retired civil craftsman in the age range 55-64 years. He is divorced and lives with his son, his son's partner and their baby, in a small semi-detached house in Whitefield. He is Karen's partner. His annual income is under £10,000. Jim goes to the theatre with Karen, almost invariably in the organised group. He attends The Octagon about four times a year, and also goes to theatres in Oldham and Manchester. He likes all kinds of theatre. Jim heard about *Private Lives* through the group organiser, who also makes the bookings. For *Private Lives* they sat in Stalls B.

Theatre by the Lake Audience Members: Demographic Profiles and Theatregoing Practices and Tastes

The seventeen audience member respondents from Theatre by the Lake are grouped according to whether they are tourists, incomers or locals, because this proved a useful basis for analysis. Profiles include demographic data, theatregoing companions, whose names are underlined where they were also interviewed, frequency of theatre visits both to Theatre by the Lake and elsewhere, and tastes in theatre. Their experiences of publicity, booking and seating are also outlined.

Tourists

Kay is a part-time bank clerk and is in the 45-54 years age range. She and her husband have almost finished building their own house in Stockton on Tees. They have one grown-up son who lives at home, and a granddaughter. Kay's income is under £10,000 and household income is between £20,000 and £30,000 per annum. She and her husband went to *Blithe Spirit* with Louise and her husband. Kay's husband is Louise's cousin. They holiday together in the Lake District on a regular basis, and attend productions at Theatre by the Lake two or three times a year. Kay also attends Darlington Civic Theatre and the Billingham Forum, as well as musicals in Sunderland and Newcastle. She likes classical drama, comedy and musicals. They receive the Theatre by the Lake brochure regularly, and so read up on what was on before they arrived. They booked in person once they had arrived in Keswick. For *Blithe Spirit* they sat in the centre of Row G, the front row of the Rear Stalls, which Kay considers "an excellent viewing position".

Louise is a full-time bank official and is in the 45-54 years age range. She lives in Holbeach, Lincolnshire, and is married with two grown-up daughters living at home. Her income is between £10,000 and £20,000, and household income is between £30,000 and £40,000 per annum. She attended *Blithe Spirit* with her husband, and with Kay and her husband. They holiday together in the Lake District regularly, attending productions at Theatre by the Lake two or three times a year. Louise also goes to the Key Theatre in Peterborough and the Angles Theatre in Wisbech. She likes all kinds of theatre. She says they came down to Theatre by the Lake to see

what was on and booked in person. They sat in the middle four seats of Row G, the front row of the Rear Stalls.

Beth is a retired nurse in the 55-64 years age range. She lives in a small semi-detached house on a main road in Liverpool. She is married to Vic, and they have a grown-up son and daughter who both live elsewhere, and a granddaughter. Household income is under £10,000 per annum. Beth usually goes to the theatre just with Vic, and they attend productions at Theatre by the Lake three times a year when they come to the Lake District on holiday. She also goes to the Empire and the Playhouse in Liverpool, and likes drama and comedy. They receive the Theatre by the Lake brochure regularly and booked for *Blithe Spirit* by phone before they left. They sat on the front row of the Rear Stalls, which is easier for Beth because she is disabled.

Vic is a retired milkman in the 65-74 years age range. He is married to Beth and they live in Liverpool. Their grown-up family live elsewhere. Household income is under £10,000 per annum. They go to the theatre as a couple, attending Theatre by the Lake three times a year when they are on holiday in The Lakes. Vic says he also goes to the Liverpool Empire and Playhouse and to local amateur productions. His preferences in theatre are for classical drama, comedy and thrillers. They receive the Theatre by the Lake brochure and booked for *Blithe Spirit* by phone in advance of their holiday. They sat on Row G because of Beth's mobility problems.

Incomers

Annette is a retired school matron/housekeeper and is in the 65-74 years age range. She is married to Bernard and they live in a medium to large size detached bungalow in Appleby. Their grown-up family live elsewhere. Household income is between £20,000 and £30,000 per annum. Annette goes to the theatre with Bernard, and they sometimes take visitors to see productions at Theatre by the Lake. They often take family members to the Christmas show there. They attend Theatre by the Lake three or four times a year and do not go to any other theatres. Annette likes modern drama, classical drama, musicals and dance. They usually receive the Theatre by the Lake brochure, but if they do not they pick one up at the tourist office. Annette and

Bernard booked for *Blithe Spirit* in person on a day visit to Keswick, when they also had a snack lunch at the theatre. They sat on the front row of the Circle, which was not very satisfactory for Annette because she is too short to see over the handrail.

Bernard is a retired Methodist minister in the 65-74 years age range. He is married to Annette and they live in Appleby. They attend Theatre by the Lake together and sometimes take visitors or other family members. Bernard goes to productions at Theatre by the Lake three or four times a year but does not attend theatre elsewhere. He likes modern and classical drama. They receive the Theatre by the Lake brochure and booked for *Blithe Spirit* in person. They sat on the front row of the Circle, but Bernard says he would prefer to sit in the Stalls in future.

Barbara is a sculptor and is in the age range 55-64 years. She is married to Derek and they live in an old farmhouse-style building, which they are renovating, in a small village near Kirkby Stephen. She has a son who lives in the adjacent cottage and a daughter living in a nearby village. Individual and household incomes were not disclosed. Barbara usually goes to the theatre just with her husband, but for *Blithe Spirit* they were accompanied by her daughter, Julie, and her husband's daughter from his previous marriage, who was visiting. Barbara attends Theatre by the Lake about six times a year and sometimes goes to theatres in Halifax, Leeds and Manchester. She likes all kinds of theatre. She thinks they noticed that *Blithe Spirit* was on when they were in Keswick, but they booked by phone from home. They sat on the back row of the Front Stalls.

Derek is a retired college lecturer in design and is in the 65-74 years age range. He is married to Barbara and they live in a small village near Kirkby Stephen. He has two grown-up daughters from his previous marriage, who both live elsewhere. Derek usually goes to the theatre with Barbara, but if they have visitors they try to go to the theatre "as a special treat". He attends Theatre by the Lake at least four times a year, and sometimes goes to Halifax Victoria Theatre, Leeds Grand Theatre and Manchester Royal Exchange. He likes all kinds of theatre, but prefers 'traditional' theatre. He also likes opera, ballet and concerts. Derek is on the Theatre by the Lake

mailing list and booked for *Blithe Spirit* by phone. He sat on the back row of the Front Stalls on the aisle.

Julie is a part-time baker and Open University student and is in the 35-44 years age range. She lives in a small semi-detached house in a village near Kirkby Stephen. She is divorced and has two school age children living at home. Her annual income is between £10,000 and £20,000. Julie went to *Blithe Spirit* with her mother, Barbara, her stepfather, Derek, and Derek's daughter. This was her first visit to Theatre by the Lake. Before she moved to Cumbria she used to attend the Lawrence Batley Theatre in Huddersfield and the Victoria Theatre in Halifax. She likes modern drama, comedy, musicals and dance. She heard about *Blithe Spirit* from her mother; her stepfather made the booking, and they sat on the back row of the Front Stalls.

Pam is a retired probation services manager and is in the 45-54 years age range. She lives in a medium to large size detached house in a hamlet near Cockermouth. She is married and has no children living at home. Her individual income is between £10,000 and £20,000, and household income is between £30,000 and £40,000 per annum. Pam attends Theatre by the Lake with her husband and they sometimes take visitors there. She also goes to amateur theatre, music performances and poetry readings in the local area. She likes all kinds of theatre, opera and ballet. Pam receives the Theatre by the Lake brochure and booked for *Blithe Spirit* by phone. She sat in the second row back of the Rear Stalls.

Gwen is a part-time research student in geology and is in the 55-64 years age range. She lives in a fairly isolated seventeenth century farmhouse a couple of miles from the nearest hamlet, and approximately halfway between Keswick and Carlisle. She is married to Richard and their children are grown-up and living elsewhere. Individual and household incomes were not disclosed. Gwen usually goes to the theatre with her husband and occasionally also with another relative or a visitor. At *Blithe Spirit* she was accompanied by Richard and their daughter, who was visiting from London. She attends Theatre by the Lake about three times a year. She currently goes to London fringe and touring theatre to see productions where her daughter is a stage lighting designer. Gwen particularly likes classical and modern drama. She thinks they heard

about *Blithe Spirit* by picking up a leaflet at the theatre. Her husband made the booking by phone, and they sat on the front row of the Circle.

Richard is a retired dental surgeon in the age range 55-64 years. He and Gwen live in their seventeenth century farmhouse in a rural area about halfway between Keswick and Carlisle. He usually goes to the theatre with Gwen. He attends Theatre by the Lake three or four times a year and also goes to the theatre in London. Richard likes classical and modern drama and comedy. He heard about *Blithe Spirit* through a Theatre by the Lake mailout, booked by phone and sat in the front row of the Circle.

Locals

Muriel is a retired school administration officer and is in the age range 55-64 years. She lives in a maisonette on a fairly new estate in Penrith. She is a widow; her grown-up family live elsewhere and she has a couple of grandchildren. She did not disclose her income. She attended *Blithe Spirit* with Joan, Sally and Marjorie, and this, in various combinations, is a regular theatregoing group. Muriel goes to Theatre by the Lake about five times a year and also goes to the theatre in Newcastle, Sunderland, Manchester, Blackpool and Pitlochry. She likes plays, ballet, musicals and concerts. Muriel receives the Theatre by the Lake brochure, and the group chose the season ticket offer on the three main house productions. On this occasion Joan made the booking for the group, but they take turns to do this. They sat on the second row back, fairly centrally, in the Rear Stalls, and this is the area they prefer.

Joan is an electrical retailer in the 55-64 years age range. She lives in a small to medium size detached bungalow in a village near Penrith. She is divorced and has one grown-up son who lives nearby. Her annual income is between £20,000 and £30,000. Joan attends Theatre by the Lake about six times a year in the regular group described above. She also goes to theatres in Edinburgh, Manchester and occasionally London. She likes drama, comedy and musicals. Joan receives the Theatre by the Lake brochure; it was her turn to make the booking for *Blithe Spirit*, which she did by phone; and they sat in their preferred place towards the front of the Rear Stalls.

Sally is an artist and a part-time special needs teaching assistant. She is in the 45-54 years age range, and lives in a fairly isolated farmhouse, which is being renovated, a few miles from Cockermouth. She is married with grown-up daughters who live elsewhere and two sons at boarding school. Her husband works away from home. Individual and household incomes were not disclosed. Sally attends Theatre by the Lake approximately eight times a year, often in the theatregoing group described above. She sometimes goes to London theatres. Her preferences in theatre are for drama and comedy. She receives the Theatre by the Lake brochure regularly. Joan made the booking for *Blithe Spirit* and they sat near the front of the Rear Stalls.

Marjorie is a retired building society manager, who now works part-time as a sales assistant. She is in the age range 45-54 years, and lives in a small to medium size semi-detached bungalow on a fairly new estate in Penrith. She is married and has no children living at home. Her individual income is under £10,000 and household income is between £10,000 and £20,000 per annum. Marjorie attends Theatre by the Lake about four times a year usually with Muriel, Joan and Sally. She also goes to theatres in Edinburgh, Pitlochry, Manchester and occasionally London. She particularly likes drama and comedy. Marjorie receives the Theatre by the Lake brochure regularly, and for *Blithe Spirit* booking and seating were as described above for the group.

Jenny is a telephone operator and is in the 45-54 years age range. She lives in a small semi-detached house on an old estate on the outskirts of Carlisle. She is married and has no children living at home. Her individual income is under £10,000 and household income is between £10,000 and £20,000 per annum. Jenny usually goes to Theatre by the Lake in a group of three females and attends about eight times a year. She also goes to the Green Room and the Stanwix Arts Theatre in Carlisle, the Everyman Theatre in Gloucester and sometimes to London theatres. She likes classical and modern drama, comedy, and thrillers but is not keen on musicals and dance. Jenny receives the Theatre by the Lake brochure and her friend made the booking. They chose the season ticket offer for the three productions in the main house, then selected the Studio and other productions they wanted to see, and booked everything at once by phone. They always try for Row G, the front row of the Rear

Stalls, since they consider it “the best row in the house”; and that is where they were sitting for *Blithe Spirit*.

Having described the overall demographic profile and theatregoing characteristics of the sample, and given individual profiles of all the respondents, in the next section I outline the social processes taking place in the interviews and detail the areas of investigation covered by the interview schedules, which are given in Appendix Four.

The Interviews: Respondent/Researcher Interaction; Interview Schedules

The interviews began with general conversation about theatregoing and the performance respondents had seen, leading into an introduction to the interview. In this, respondents were told a little about the research, encouraged to expand on their replies, and assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The interviews were tape-recorded and typically lasted about forty-five minutes. I indicated earlier that my own enthusiasm for theatre was useful in building rapport with respondents in that I could share experiences with those who had long been theatregoers, and could find areas of interest where the respondent had either less theatregoing experience or was more reticent. To give examples of how respondents varied in these ways, I describe here two extreme cases. My interview with Helen, from the *Private Lives* audience, was punctuated and prompted by frequent referral to the wealth of information she had produced on her theatregoing experience. This information included all her theatre programmes kept since student days in London, and plenty of background literature on The Octagon theatre and its history, which she had no hesitation in lending me. Needless to say, this proved one of the lengthiest interviews. Helen is also retired and has enough time to enjoy her tastes and interests. At the other extreme, and from the *Blithe Spirit* audience, was my interview with Marjorie. She works part-time, takes responsibility for the care of ageing relatives, and is involved in a number of civic groups. So her mind was full of other things at the time of the interview. Eventually, however, we found common ground, and an area of her theatregoing that fired her enthusiasm, in a discussion of female comedians and comedy playwrights. Through this mutual interest I was able to approach the issues

of concern in the research. With such a respondent, of course, I would not want to press matters further than what I felt was a genuine response on her part.

The interview with Marjorie raises the issue of how far I chose to probe in discussions with respondents and, conversely, where I decided to stop a line of questioning. In Marjorie's case, it was more a matter of focusing her mind, and it was easy to pursue a line of questioning through a joint interest in female comedy. My interview with Pam, however, provides an example of how I decided not to continue with an area of enquiry. Pam is also one of the *Blithe Spirit* audience members, and I discovered in the course of the interview that she and her husband did not have a television in the house at all. This, of course, prompted my interest in her comparison between live and mediatized audience experiences. We spent a little time discussing how she listened to the radio and liked to read, and how she felt about watching television when there was one where they were on holiday. After a while I decided it would be better not to continue this theme, since I had noted that she and her husband had taken early retirement from stressful occupations, and had come to live in the quiet hamlet in the Lake District where the interview took place. I felt that to ask her to explain further the absence of a television set in their house would be an invasion of her privacy, and we proceeded to other issues before she could become uncomfortable. Such sensitivities are, of course, a fascinating part of the interviewing process. The interviews as a whole yielded a great richness of data and, as can be seen over the next four chapters, enable me to give a wide range of quotations from most of the respondents and, indeed, to illustrate a number of research issues from all of them. I continue now with a description of the areas of investigation covered by the interview schedules.

There are three interview schedules: one each for the director and actors, and another for the audience members. All the schedules cover audience response, the influence of the stage and auditorium configuration, and changes in audience perception, but the schedule for audience members also asks about theatregoing life narratives and everyday lives, including mediatized cultural consumption and other activities. The director and actors' interview schedules ask how audience response developed at the performance, and how the actors reacted to the response. They seek

comparisons with audience response at other performances of the production, and ask how size and, as far as they were aware of it, social composition of the audience affected their response. Regarding theatre spaces, the interviews explore how the director and actors feel about working in The Octagon or Theatre by the Lake auditorium, and ask the actors for comparisons with their work in other spaces, for example larger auditoria or other configurations. In the area of changes in audience perception, the schedules explore what social issues they feel the plays address, what ideas the audience might come away with, and how they would like their audiences to be affected by the performance.

The opening question in the audience members' interview schedule asks respondents how they first became interested in going to the theatre. This is followed by questions about their theatregoing companions, and where they sat in the auditorium for the performance. The section on audience response covers respondents' expectations of the performance, their own response to it, and their perception of audience response as a whole. There are also questions about how they thought size and, as far as they were aware of it, social composition of the audience affected response. Concerning theatre spaces, the interview asks whether respondents thought The Octagon or Theatre by the Lake auditorium was appropriate for the production. It also encourages them to discuss the kinds of auditoria they like and dislike, together with their experiences of these. In terms of changes in audience perception, respondents are asked what impressed them about the performance, as well as any weaknesses they felt there were. There are questions about what they identified with and what affected them in the performance, and what social issues they think the plays address.

The interview approaches respondents' communication practices by asking whether they discussed the performance with their theatregoing companions during the Interval, at the end of the performance and subsequently, and by asking what sort of things they discussed. It also probes whether respondents talked about performances with people other than their companions, either on that evening or at a later date. Their other theatre-related activities, such as membership of drama groups, 'Friends' or other theatregoing groups are explored. Respondents are asked whether

they watch drama on television and how this compares to attending live drama. The interview also covers whether they read theatre reviews, access theatre websites and use the Internet for information about theatre and drama. Respondents are invited to discuss their other activities, especially how much they watch television and what they watch, cinema visits, computer use, and membership of groups and clubs. Finally, they are asked how much of their time is spent on theatre and theatre-related activities, and why, in the end, they go to the theatre. There is a general question at the end of all the interview schedules asking whether respondents would like to add anything further to the discussion. All interviews have been transcribed by the researcher, yielding two hundred and fifty pages of transcript. The qualitative data thus produced have been analysed as described in the following section.

Data Analysis: Theatre Reports; Categorical Content Analysis

Data analysis has been approached in two ways. The first is through reports for each theatre. These provide an overall picture of the samples, and take up themes of particular interest to the theatres, which also relate to the academic issues the research addresses. The second approach to data analysis has been through categorizing the content of the interviews according to the concepts and themes in the issues the research addresses.

The reports have been issued in three stages for each theatre. The first describes the overall demographic profile of respondents, their frequency of theatregoing, companions, and tastes. This adds to the theatres' regular quantitative data especially through the focus on how theatregoers attend performances in regular groups. An indication was also given on the information required specifically by The Octagon as to whether theatregoers felt the ticket price gave them value for money. Conveniently for the research, this was included in a discussion of where they were sitting for the performance. The second report provides individual profiles of respondents, and quotations from the interviews with the director, actors and audience members. The quotations give respondents' ideas on the play, audience response, changes in audience perception, auditoria, and differences among live performance, television, and the cinema. In addition, quotations from the audience member interviews include their views on the production of the play, what The Octagon or

Theatre by the Lake means to them, and why they go to the theatre. These qualitative data give the theatres a deeper understanding of what sort of people attend, and their views on the above themes, than any single answer response given in quantitative research. Similarly, a wider range of themes is discussed: for example changes in audience perception, why respondents go to the theatre, and meanings of the theatres and theatregoing in their lives. Here also the views of the director and actors are quoted, so that some perspective is gained on the interaction between performers and audience, which is the crux of the theatre event. The final report for each theatre structures discussion around the ideas of theatre practitioners such as Peter Brook, Richard Eyre and Iain Mackintosh, and also draws on Susan Bennett's work. These authors and their ideas were chosen so that the reports directly address theatre practitioners' concerns. They provide basic discussion on issues such as the audience and community experience that theatre engenders, which are developed in the academic discussion in this thesis. The reports discuss the interaction between performers and audience, changes in audience perception, differences among live performance, television, and the cinema, and ideas about theatregoing and community. They indicate also what respondents consider to be the particular strengths of these theatres, allowing this information especially to be included in the development of their marketing strategies.

In interpreting and discussing the data in Chapters Five to Eight, I have found the theatre reports useful as a starting point, but a more thorough and rigorous analysis has been undertaken through the overall categorical content analysis. These chapters follow the trajectory of the whole theatregoing process, from theatregoing life narratives, through interactions at performances and changes in audience perception, to everyday experiences and the wider theatre event, examining community experience throughout. I relate the data to the literature discussed in Chapters One to Three, focusing on the concepts employed in the research and the issues it addresses.

CHAPTER FIVE
A MULTIPLICITY OF CONTEXTS

Introduction

I begin discussion of the data by considering audience member respondents' social and theatregoing backgrounds. Such backgrounds encompass a whole range of contexts, and I show here how they provide bases for the construction of community. In Chapter Four I gave demographic details of the sample, whereas in this chapter I want first to look at respondents' views of the demographics of theatre audiences generally, of the audiences attending the two research performances, and of how others perceive theatregoers. This enables a comparison between these views and the actual sample, providing an understanding of what sort of people demographically theatregoers are. In the discussion I consider age and gender and theatre audiences, and then focus especially on how far they are class based, in order to assess further Bourdieu's findings on cultural consumption and class.

Following on from this, in the second section of the chapter I examine how audience member respondents have become theatregoers. Through their theatregoing life narratives I consider whether they have developed their cultural tastes and practices according to Bourdieu's concept of habitus and its relation to social class, or whether there are other processes involved. With a view to understanding how and why respondents' preferences have evolved, this section also considers their ideas about differences between live and mediatized performance and audience experience. The scrutiny of these differences gives some purchase on issues of community experience in co-present and imagined situations.

In the third section of the chapter I discuss audience member respondents' social networks, looking at their theatregoing companions, and their cultural consumption and activities other than theatregoing. This is to assess first whether social capital is important to them and how it might encourage the development of community, and second to see how far respondents' practices are omnivorous, casting doubt on Bourdieu's class-related distinction of taste. Respondents' perception of boundaries, and issues of social inclusion and exclusion are discussed throughout as they arise from the data. I draw conclusions at the end of each section, and a

summary links Chapters Five and Six. I begin with respondents' views of theatregoers' demographic profile.

Who Goes to the Theatre?

The demographic characteristics of theatregoers highlighted here are age, gender, and social class. For each of these, respondents' views are discussed first for theatre audiences generally, and then for the Noël Coward research performances. Within each of these sections I give the director and actors' ideas first, followed by those of the audience members. An important point to note is that many of the audience member respondents said they were not particularly aware of the social composition of the audience at the research performances. This is not the case for the director and actors who, while they could only gain an impression of their audiences, were very interested in their profile. However, audience members, in the course of their discussion, revealed that they had in fact absorbed quite a lot about the social make-up of the audience as a whole. Furthermore, their views offer a number of insights into processes of inclusion and exclusion. I consider first respondents' ideas about theatregoers' age.

The Middle Aged?

Respondents' ideas here confirm the view, and the statistics given in Chapter Four, that theatre audiences tend to be at least middle aged, except where performances are put on specifically with children in mind, such as the Christmas productions. Nigel, an actor at Theatre by the Lake, says,

> Theatre audiences . . . tend to be surprisingly elderly. By that I mean probably mid forties upwards. In this theatre they tend to be mid fifties upwards, I would say. Just judging by the number of perms and grey hairs and twinkling glasses, and watching them come in from the car park. You think it's quite an old audience profile.

He mentions the difficulty of attracting young people to the theatre, suggesting why it may be that not many attend, and adds that they are, of course, important for the future of theatre.

> Getting young people in is quite difficult. Would you overcome your shyness and go into a building to see a piece of boring old stuff you've read in school, if you had the choice? Possibly not. That's why youth

> theatre and getting the theatregoing habit, one hopes, will create an audience for the future.

Nigel is very appreciative of the "elderly" audiences he performs for. He says, "Elderly audiences are very active, very firm, very friendly, and they know their stuff. They've been at it a long time." Concerning theatre audiences generally, audience members observe that both research theatres tend to attract older audiences. Bernard describes Theatre by the Lake audiences as "mature", and Jill says, "It's an older crowd that goes [to The Octagon]."

Respondents saw the audiences for *Private Lives* and *Blithe Spirit* as being in keeping with the tendency towards maturity, and this is in agreement with my own observations at the research performances. As Penny, an actor in *Blithe Spirit*, puts it, "Coward attracts the older generation." The idea that older audiences "know their stuff", is echoed when Kate, from the *Private Lives* cast, says, "It is an older audience. Whether or not they have a history with the play, they seem to come expecting a certain style. They know they're going to see Noël Coward." Peter, the director of *Private Lives*, discusses how the older audience responded to the play in ways that are different to how a younger audience might respond.

> There was an older element in the audience tonight, who I think responded more to the social mannerisms and etiquette of the day than perhaps a younger audience might. A younger audience would enjoy different things about it. The older audience keyed into the world of the play more.

These ideas suggest that age can be a base for a sense of community among the audience at a theatre performance. In addition, a "history" with the play, or Noël Coward generally, suggests the possibility of interpretive communities arising, as I have suggested, in relation to a text or dramatist.

Audience member respondents take up these ideas of older audiences for Noël Coward productions having a history with the plays and relating to them. Susan, a newcomer to theatregoing and at the younger end of the age distribution of the *Private Lives* sample, says, "I noticed that there were a lot of elderly people there, so possibly they'd already seen this play before and knew what to expect." Another

younger member of the sample, Jill, said that the older audience seemed to enjoy it "because it was the older style. Probably they related to it a bit better." Bernard says,

> I would have thought that a play like *Blithe Spirit* would have appealed to [the mature audience], partly because of the time when it was set. Some of the people there would actually remember the wartime period, the fashions and everything that goes on then . . . or at least have some idea. I think that would help them to appreciate it.

Some of the audience member respondents' comments suggest a sense of inclusion in terms of age. Beryl, in the 65-74 years age group, thinks, "The majority of the audience were my age group", and Muriel says, "It seemed to me we were all of a similar . . . age. I didn't see any great differences. I think we were all there to enjoy ourselves." Derek refers to the older audience's history with the play, and how their commonality influences audience response.

> They were a fairly old audience and therefore, like me, they'd probably seen *Blithe Spirit* before, either on television or on film. I'd seen the film. I think the audience were well tuned in . . . We all laughed at the same time, when people got the same meaning. Certainly, being an older generation, watching that sort of play, I suppose you do empathize with [other audience members].

Summarizing these points about similarity in age and how the audience related to Noël Coward, Charles says,

> People who go to productions of Noël Coward will be of our generation, who've lived through it. Therefore they appreciate it more than a younger audience would. The audience who were there seemed to be generally of our generation and did contribute a lot to [the performance].

His suggestion that the audience contributed a lot to the performance foreshadows my discussion on interactions between audiences and performers in the next chapter.

The other side of the argument on age as an inclusive aspect of community presents a sense of the exclusion of younger people. Karen echoes Charles when she says, "I don't know whether a younger audience would have appreciated it as much [as the older audience]." Respondents discuss how younger members of their own families feel about theatregoing and specifically Noël Coward productions. Enid says, "I think Noël Coward fits in with older people more than perhaps my children and grandchildren . . . Mind you, our daughter and son don't go to the theatre, they go

to films more." When telling her son about her visit to *Private Lives*, Jean reports, "He said, 'Oh, that's Noël Coward', with that sort of note in his voice." She continues, "I think perhaps if he had been persuaded to go he would have enjoyed it, but he might have thought 'Oh no, not Noël Coward, not in my line.'" These particular cases are more a matter of self-exclusion on the part of younger people themselves than older theatregoers actively excluding them. As such they present an extension of Lamont's (1994) ideas on weak boundaries, in that as well as being present where there is tolerance, they are only perceived by the one self-excluding party, and not at all by the other. At *Blithe Spirit* one or two respondents noted the presence of "some youngsters at the front". Sally says, "I just wondered quite what they were going to get out of it." In observing the youngsters' response, Jenny says,

> They were still managing to have a good laugh at some things, although I thought it might be just a little beyond them to be honest. The inferences that were there. But they were amused by it, especially when his deceased wife came on; they got the humour of that right away.

So this situation presents the possibility of the exclusion of younger people, but has been overcome by their ability to enjoy at least some aspects of the performance.

There are others in the sample who think that *Blithe Spirit* particularly has wider appeal than simply to an older audience. Kay says, "I would have thought that type of play would attract most age groups . . . I think a light comedy like that would appeal to a wide range of people", and Beth thinks, "It's the type of play that anyone could go and see and enjoy." Of the younger people in the sample who attended the research performances, Jill went to *Private Lives* with a regular group of theatregoers, Susan is a newcomer to theatre, and Julie went to *Blithe Spirit* with her parents. All of them enjoyed the performances, so, as the director of *Private Lives* suggests, a younger audience appreciates "different things about it" from the "older element". Thus, age segmentation in the audience can engender a sense of community at different moments in the performance for different age groups. Having considered here theatregoers' age, in the next section I look at respondents' ideas about gender and theatre audiences.

Females?

I have already mentioned the tendency for there to be more women than men in theatre audiences, and Nigel, the Theatre by the Lake actor, backs this up.

> An enormously important thing is that in every theatre audience I've ever experienced, I reckon it's about four to one women to men. It really is enormously significant.

In fact his impression is a little exaggerated. Although they are not statistical samples, the research samples are two to one women to men at The Octagon, and a little over three to one at Theatre by the Lake. As I have discussed in Chapter Four, in the research theatres' audiences overall the proportion of women to men is around two to one, and this is generally in agreement with national statistics. Joan, who is part of a regular female theatregoing group at Theatre by the Lake, discusses gender with reference to theatregoing generally, and introduces the element of choice of play.

> I think on the whole women enjoy live theatre more than men. I suppose it depends what you go to see, but the things we go to, I suppose we choose them because we're women.

This comment ties in with other respondents' views of the gender composition of audiences at the Noël Coward plays. Penny, the Theatre by the Lake actor, says, "I think *Blithe Spirit* appeals to women", and Ruth, an audience member at *Private Lives*, observes, "Sometimes you get more women, but I noticed it was more couples, so perhaps the wives had been able to persuade their husbands to come along." Again, respondents' views of the gender composition at the research performances are in line with my own observations. As well as suggesting that taste can be a matter of gender, this indicates that women are often the instigation for theatre visits among couples. David, on his first visit to a theatre, says, "My wife dragged me along!" As it happens he enjoyed the experience, but this is not necessarily the case, and I give two examples below to illustrate how aspects of inclusion and exclusion can arise with regard to gender and theatregoing.

One respondent who says that she does observe the audience as well as watching the play is Joan.

> This is something I always do when I go to the theatre. I look at other people and see what they're doing. I often find it's the men who look as though they've come under duress. Not always, but quite often.

> When I looked around at *Blithe Spirit*, there were one or two men who were sitting rather poker-faced, so I thought that they had gone under duress.

These men, it seems reasonable to suggest, are feeling excluded from the experience of the majority of audience members. Joan does have a precedent for her observation, in that her husband, whom she divorced sixteen years ago, could not be persuaded to go with her to the theatre. She says, "My husband wasn't interested and would have ridiculed me wanting to go." He thus excluded himself from theatregoing and, at that stage of her life, Joan as well. The divorce represented a transition in Joan's life narrative from being unable to pursue one of her cultural tastes to having the freedom to go to the theatre without censure. As I show in the second section of this chapter, this is a case of the people in respondents' life narratives influencing their theatregoing habits, and these are not necessarily from family of origin as Bourdieu (2000) suggests.

Vic relates the second example of exclusion here. In this case the person both excluding himself and being excluded is male. The situation could also arise where the individual is female, but, given the above data on women and theatregoing, this is less likely. This is how Vic describes the situation.

> I had a chap next to me and I felt like thumping him. I felt like saying, 'If you're not interested, why don't you go home?' I don't know why he was there. He just kept looking at his watch and he was right by me. So it was a bit annoying.

It is clear from the above that, whether or not this person felt excluded, Vic would like to exclude him. Further insight into processes of inclusion and exclusion is provided in the next section where I discuss respondents' views on theatregoers and social class.

The Middle Class?

Here I show how far respondents view theatregoing as an exclusive, middle class pursuit in line with Bourdieu's survey data, and how far theatregoing seems to them to be broader based in class terms. Beginning with Nigel's ideas again, he first says that he thinks theatre audiences are "probably very middle class". He qualifies this immediately when he says,

> Every theatre I know tries its best to market itself more generally, to try to overcome any inherent prejudice that people have, that it's not for the likes of us. Well it is. It's just general entertainment.

Nigel is noting here that people do think that theatre is a middle class or élitist pursuit, and that if they themselves are not at least middle class it is not for them and they should not expect to enjoy it. As an actor, however, Nigel sees his work as being for a wider audience. He continues:

> What I'm increasingly worried about is that theatres are becoming perceived as the 'arts palace on the hill' and not for the likes of us. I don't think that regional repertory theatre should downgrade itself into purely commercial work, but I do wish it would reach out to its community more and draw from that community . . . [Some theatres are] doing that . . . That's important to me.

His view is that theatres should try to be more socially inclusive by attracting a wider audience from the communities in which they are embedded, and relating to them in terms of the work they perform.

Among the audience member respondents, Rob supports the perception of theatregoing as a middle class practice when he refers to the *Private Lives* audience as "perhaps middle class, which you probably get with theatre audiences anyway". Derek recognizes that theatregoers are often middle class or professional people, and backs up Nigel's ideas about encouraging those who are 'not the likes of us' to go.

> Just speaking for myself, there seems to be a certain type of people who go to the theatre, and there are a lot of people who don't go. I suppose these are the people we are trying to encourage to go, which is why we take people along with us if we can. I suppose you could say, middle class is a word that is bandied about a lot, but I think there are maybe quite a lot of professional people who go to the theatre.

There are therefore theatre audience members, actors and theatre managements who recognize that theatregoing is perceived as middle class and exclusive, and are actively trying to make it more inclusive. One *Private Lives* audience member gives a very practical reason why theatregoing can be exclusive.

> We don't go to the theatre as often as I would like . . . Mainly that's a money issue. We don't have as much money as would make it possible for us to go more. (Karen)

Karen enjoys the 'big musicals' as well as drama in smaller theatres. Since tickets for such musicals are expensive relative to those for drama, she chooses which events to attend according to her preferences and budget. Much of her budget for cultural consumption and leisure activities does go on attending musicals and drama, her only other major activity being holidays. The issue of money raises the question of frequency of theatregoing, suggesting that middle class people attend more frequently, but that a wider social spread of people also enjoy theatre and would go more often if they could afford it.

Audience member respondents give plenty of evidence of how theatregoing can be seen from outside as an exclusive cultural practice. Discussion with work colleagues about theatre visits is often revealing. Jill, who is a police officer, "raved about" a production of *The Rat Pack* she had seen at The Octagon, but did not discuss *Private Lives* because "I don't know that it would appeal to the people I work with." This is an instance of how others might feel excluded from the subject matter rather than from theatregoing practices as such. An example of exclusion from theatregoing practices can be seen in David's experience. David is a building site manager and, as we have seen, was "dragged along" on his first theatre visit by his wife. He mentioned the visit to his work colleagues the following day.

> It was just a case of saying that we'd been. It has some kind of social standing, the fact that you go to the theatre. I would never have dreamt it. There is something about it.

This is an indication of how David's work colleagues had responded to the information about his new leisure activity. The implication is that he had moved away from their cultural practices, and they felt excluded from this new pursuit. Julie is more explicit about the processes taking place in this type of situation. She says,

> Theatregoing is very often all about class. I wasn't very aware of differences in class when I went to Theatre by the Lake, but I do feel it's very much a middle class pursuit. My ex-partner in Huddersfield turned himself from being from a working class background, and he enjoyed theatre and things like that. But it was something he kept from his workmates for fear of ridicule. He just told people he was going out in town. He wouldn't admit he was going to the theatre.

Again, this person has moved away from working class cultural practices, but in this case he does not admit it to others. Relating this to Lamont's (1994) idea that strong

boundaries are constructed where there is a lack of cultural tolerance, the "ridicule" that might result in the above case suggests a strong boundary situation. Joan used the same word to describe her ex-husband's attitude to her own love of theatre.

Louise takes up Julie's point about not being very aware of class differences at Theatre by the Lake. She says, "It was a fair mix of audience [at *Blithe Spirit*]. It always is here. You always get a really good mixed audience from all social strata." At *Private Lives*, Helen describes the audience as "probably a better mix of an audience than it is sometimes". My own observations at the research performances were that there was a spread of people across the middle classes, but tending towards lower middle class rather than upper middle class. Helen's "better mix" contrasts with Louise's "fair mix" and, for her, implies "better class", since she goes on to say,

> Sometimes you get people who look as if they're not regular theatregoers because they bring drinks in and things like that. Now I notice they're warning people not to do that.

Helen is noting behaviour that she thinks excludes people from being "regular" theatregoers. David, on the other hand, observes behaviour that, he assumes, *is* typical of theatregoers.

> Everybody [at *Private Lives*] was well dressed, turning out for an evening at the theatre. Nobody went in anoraks like you go to the cinema. They all made a special effort to be dressed for the theatre and I thought that was right.

This supports Williams's point (1989b:4) about going to the theatre being a special occasion, as contrasted with the general availability of television drama in the home. It also suggests that theatregoing is a more élitist pursuit than going to the cinema. In these last two examples we have seen types of behaviour that mark boundaries of inclusion and exclusion for theatre audiences. Or, rather, we have seen what these two respondents perceive as the boundaries. In line with Lamont (1994), however, others may perceive these boundaries differently and, I suggest, they are subject to change.

Audience member respondents from each of the Noël Coward performances made observations that demonstrate how theatre audiences can be seen from within as inclusive. Concerning the *Private Lives* audience, Beryl says,

> The majority of them were socially very similar [to me] . . . Coward seemed always to depict certainly the more prosperous side of life. You looked around the audience and people were of a kind.

The same point is made about the *Blithe Spirit* audience by Muriel, who says, "We were all of a similar class really." Overall, respondents are aware that theatregoing is often perceived as middle class and exclusive, although they are not actively exclusive of others themselves. Some seek to make it more inclusive by encouraging a wider range of people to go, while others, such as Vic or Julie's ex-partner, avoid conflict situations that highlight the boundaries. The oldest respondent in the audience member sample, Alice, who is ninety-two, suggested that for the *Private Lives* production "social composition of the audience didn't matter because it touched everybody's life in one sense, and you could share the experience. Life is life wherever you are." She is referring here to the subject matter of *Private Lives* and its universality. This idea helps to explain how members of the audience who are not typical theatregoers, that is they may be younger or of a lower social class, can still enjoy a performance. In other words, demographic profile is not the whole story. These other aspects of theatregoing are taken up throughout the subsequent discussion of the data.

Conclusion: Who Goes to the Theatre?

In conclusion, respondents' views of theatregoers' demographic profile confirm that a typical theatre audience is perceived as middle aged, middle class and predominantly female. The sample, however, as shown in Chapter Four, includes younger respondents and people from the lower middle class. Demographic profile is an important part of the social context of theatregoers and, as I have shown in this section, provides bases for the construction of community. The data suggest that age segmentation at the research performances contributed to community formation through the aspects of the performance different age groups appreciated. Similarly the influence of gender on taste, noted especially at *Blithe Spirit*, contributed to a sense of community among women in the audience, whereas some of the men looked as though "they had gone under duress". Respondents observed that, at the research theatres, particularly Theatre by the Lake, "you always get a really good mixed audience from all social strata". The breadth of the middle class in the sample,

especially since it encompasses the lower ranges, and their broad tastes outlined in Chapter Four, which include experimental theatre, cast doubt on the idea of theatre audiences being *either* solidly middle class and allied only to mainstream theatre, *or* intellectual and connected to avant-garde theatre, as Bourdieu (2000) suggests.

Aspects of inclusion and exclusion are prevalent in the data here. Perception of boundaries plays a major part: as Lamont (1994) suggests, they do indeed move according to where a person stands. For example, Helen finds it unreasonable for theatregoers to bring drinks into the auditorium, but for those who do this it is an acceptable part of their theatre visit. Another illustration of this is where Jill sees both *The Rat Pack* and *Private Lives* as acceptable theatregoing occasions, but her work colleagues would condone only the former. The data offer instances of inclusion and exclusion, and suggest the processes involved. Examples of theatre audiences as inclusive are awareness of similarity in age and class, or of how theatregoers are dressed. A clear example of exclusion is Karen's account of the expense of theatre visits. Processes of inclusion and exclusion are illuminated especially where individuals adopt cultural practices not usually attributed to their social class. The response of David's work colleagues highlights where they thought the boundary had been breached between working class and middle class cultural practices. Following on from this, and developing Lamont's (1994) ideas on cultural tolerance, there is some further indication of how boundaries can be weak or strong. The data suggest that a weak boundary is where only one party constructs it, for example where people freely exclude themselves, as when Jean's son does not want to see a Noël Coward production, even though Jean would welcome his presence. Strong boundaries are indicated where two parties acknowledge them, for example where David or Julie's ex-partner cross a boundary, and this act is then ridiculed by their workmates. Again, perception of boundaries comes into play: David sees the boundary as weak enough to cross, whereas his colleagues might not agree. In these examples a weak boundary is a matter of taste and a strong boundary is a question of class.

There are a number of people in the sample, notably the younger and male respondents, who are outside the typical theatre audience demographic profile. They

enjoy theatre generally and also appreciated the Noël Coward productions. The reasons why they do will become clearer as the interpretation of the data progresses. This moves on from the idea that community formation among theatre audiences is based on demography, to include all the other aspects of the theatregoing experience. The next section in this chapter looks further into the social context of theatre audiences, examining how the audience member respondents have become theatregoers.

How do People Become Theatregoers?

First here I discuss, through audience member respondents' own accounts of their theatregoing life narratives, how far the development of their cultural tastes and practices has been according to Bourdieu's concept of habitus and its relation to social class, and how far there have been other influences in this development. I then look at the actors' ideas on differences between live and mediatized performance to give a view from the production side of performer/audience interaction. Following this I discuss the differences that audience member respondents' perceive between live and mediatized audience experience. This first shows how and why their preferences have evolved, and second illuminates differences between the co-present interaction at theatre performances and the mediatized experience. As I have argued, this underpins differences between face-to-face and imagined community.

Theatregoers' Own Stories

I first discuss audience members' accounts that quintessentially support Bourdieu's ideas on habitus and social class, where early cultural experience in the family has a strong influence on the development of tastes, which are rooted in and tied to class gradations. I follow this with features of their narratives that indicate perhaps other, wider influences in the development of their theatregoing. Relating discussion specifically to the research performances, finally here I look at respondents' histories regarding Noël Coward and his plays *Private Lives* and *Blithe Spirit*, and show how their experience, or sometimes lack of it, impacts on theatregoing tastes and practices and community formation.

For many respondents their theatregoing began by being taken to live theatre as children by parents or other members of the family. Some refer to their first experiences being pantomime or Gilbert and Sullivan productions. A number of respondents say explicitly that going to live theatre was part of their upbringing. Gwen says, "It was just part of life . . . something that one did from time to time." For Rob, "[I]t was part of the way I was brought up. My parents liked going to amateur operatics, and to shows when we were on holiday. It opened up a way of enjoying live entertainment." Beryl's mother used to take her to the theatre: "She encouraged me and thought it was part of my upbringing." Beryl's view of the audience at *Private Lives* exemplifies Bourdieu's idea of habitus and its link with social class. Having observed that the people in the audience were "socially . . . of a kind", she adds, "There again you see, you tend to go in the directions your parents guide you, and it's all background really, isn't it? You don't often break away from it."

Some respondents mention the importance of introducing their children or grandchildren to theatre, thus indicating the ongoing nature of the transmission of cultural practices from generation to generation. While this supports Bourdieu's idea of habitus, these individual cases are not especially attached to bourgeois cultural practices, since they are mostly at the lower end of the middle class spectrum. Muriel says, "I enjoy taking my grandchildren to the theatre and encouraging them to enjoy it." Although Louise's parents did not take her to the theatre: "It isn't something [they] would ever have gone to or could ever have afforded", she now thinks, "Every family should take their kids, even if it's only to a pantomime once a year, just to have an experience of the theatre." In this case, Louise's economic circumstances have improved, and she is reinforcing the cultural practices she has acquired. Annette took her children to Stratford, "so that they could see what [Shakespeare] is all about . . . because . . . plays ought to be seen and not read". School trips to see Shakespeare's plays were part of Helen's own introduction to theatre, but when her daughter was studying *Julius Caesar*, "the school no longer went on trips; they said there wouldn't be any call for it", so Helen herself took her daughter to see the play in Stratford.

The following discussion features the ways in which respondents have been introduced to theatregoing that are not closely tied to family and social class. Since respondents' life narratives offer extensive, longitudinal data, rather than the survey data generated at a point in time in people's lives that Bourdieu's work provides, they show how theatregoing practices can change during the life course. A starting point in this rich, qualitative data is the experience of theatre through school that features in many of the respondents' life narratives. This includes theatre visits, school drama productions and studying Shakespeare's plays. Theatregoing is discovered as an enjoyable cultural practice during secondary education rather than, taking up here simultaneously a related finding in Bourdieu's (2000) work, being a reflection of the cultural practices of people with higher educational qualifications, or educational capital. That is, for the respondents, theatregoing practices are established through their education, and this does not necessarily include higher education. These early experiences of theatre are also not related to class patterns of cultural consumption since, at the period in time of most respondents' introduction to theatre, they were available in schools to all. Some respondents mention both home and school as being influential in encouraging their interest in theatre. Gwen says, "I grew up with it at school and at home", and Richard was taken to theatre by family and then "at school we were taken and were involved in productions". As well as going to theatre with her mother, Beryl's schoolmistresses were an important part of her introduction.

> I was brought up in wartime, and one didn't have the opportunities quite so much, but at school, looking back, our mistresses really tried to do their best for us to have the opportunity to go into Manchester when plays came. It wasn't as easy as it would have been today . . . As an adult now, looking back, I was jolly glad that I'd had the opportunity.

Thus Beryl's teachers influenced the development of her theatregoing practices at the school stage of her life course.

Other respondents do not mention home as an influence at all, but do discuss their experience of drama and theatre at school. As in Beryl's case, some female respondents emphasize the importance of schoolmistresses to their experience of drama and theatre. Annette continues the theme of teachers' attempts to overcome the disadvantages that wartime brought to education.

> I was always quite interested from my schooldays. I had a very good headmistress, who was very keen and would give up her Easter holidays just to do drama with sixth formers, which was very encouraging . . . It wasn't very easy because it was wartime, but at the end of term she did her best to take us around wherever possible. We were very isolated up here in that period.

Formative experiences of drama and theatre at school are important for Marjorie. She says she first became interested in going to the theatre in her schooldays.

> I studied for literature GCE and was introduced to Shakespeare. I went to Stratford, and also met J B Priestley at that time. The lady who was our teacher was very keen; she was marvellous. We were studying *The Good Companions* . . . and we met J B Priestley in his library, and had a chat and a cup of tea. And that was at sixteen.

Helen's experience of school plays and trips to see productions of Shakespeare's and other plays they were studying developed further when she went to college in London.

> [My] college in London . . . was a direct bus ride from the Old Vic. This was in 1954 and they were in the middle of a five-year cycle of all Shakespeare's plays. I went to three years of those. I could just get on a bus from door to door . . . It was virtually a new one every few weeks. That's probably why I really got into it, and began to see it as a routine thing that must be done. Not just the occasional night out, but something that you could go to a lot . . . As well as going to the Old Vic, we used to go up into town, every Saturday, and we often went to the theatre. We'd queue up in the morning to go in the 'gods'. We saw all the top actors then.

The availability of theatre in London during Helen's college days provided an impetus to the frequency of her theatregoing.

Prior to this discussion of her experience of theatre at school and as a student, Helen refers not so much to the influence of her family, as to the way of life in the small town she grew up in. This introduces another aspect of British life, which, along with school plays and Shakespeare, is influential in respondents' theatregoing histories. This is the national penchant for amateur dramatics. Helen describes her early theatregoing life as follows:

> The small town I was brought up in . . . had an amateur dramatic society, which had a musical and a straight play each year to which the whole town went. You always knew somebody who was in it. You got that feeling of going to the theatre. There were two cinemas in the

> town, which showed two different programmes a week, so you got used to that as well. That was part of the pattern. So you grew up knowing about the stage.

Not only did respondents go to amateur theatre, but also many of them had participated in such groups at some point in their lives. This could be as a performer, backstage, or both of these. For example, Beth was in plays as a child and used to do a lot of ballet; Jim sang, acted and danced in amateur operatic society productions; Jack did backstage work with a similar group; and Alice acted and helped out backstage. When she was a girl, Joan belonged to a village drama group, where, she says, "you have to be able to do a bit of everything". While it is not a focus of this research, participation in amateur dramatics has the potential to offer face-to-face community experience.

Like Helen, some respondents began their theatregoing by attending amateur productions, and then extended this to professional theatre. In the following two examples, especially, there is no hint of any family influence on theatregoing practices. Both respondents quoted here are lower middle class, verging on working class, and thus present significant cases where theatregoing tastes and practices have not been stimulated by middle class family influence, but have grown from other sources. Vic, one of the tourist respondents at Theatre by the Lake, says, "We used to go to the local amateur dramatic society productions. We liked them and so then we went to the Liverpool Empire and the Playhouse." Similarly, Jenny says that she and her husband "started going to the 'am dram' . . . Initially it was the plays themselves: 'Oh I'll go and see that one.' After that we'd book up for the season, but ignore the ones that we didn't really want to go to". Now she books season tickets for both amateur and professional productions. Other respondents also continue to attend amateur productions. Julie attends both amateur and professional productions, and her theatregoing life narrative illustrates how accessibility of different theatres influences theatregoing habits. Before she moved to Cumbria she used to attend the Lawrence Batley Theatre in Huddersfield and the Victoria Theatre in Halifax. Similarly, Enid mentions the importance to her theatregoing of the Library Theatre and the Royal Exchange Theatre, both in Manchester. Pam and Bernard were brought up in London, and so had extensive opportunity to experience live theatre,

both through family and independently, in their early years. Pam has also lived in Sheffield, and enjoyed productions at the Lyceum Theatre and the Crucible Theatre there. Bernard moved around the country in his work, and says,

> In Glasgow, we went [to the theatre] a lot . . . [and] . . . we used to go very regularly when we lived in Bath. It was a question of accessibility. We didn't really mind what was on; we used to just go, virtually every week actually, to the Theatre Royal in Bath.

So the accessibility of both amateur and professional theatres plays an important role in the formation of respondents' theatregoing practices. There is an element of chance in this, as indeed there is in the next influence on respondents' theatregoing life narratives that I discuss. This is the impact on their theatregoing of the people respondents meet during their life course.

Schoolteachers have already been mentioned as an important influence on respondents' interest in theatre, and we have seen that Helen went to theatre as a student with like-minded friends. Following her introduction to live performance by her parents, Muriel also began going to the theatre with a group of friends.

> Rep companies used to come . . . [and] my friends and I used to go on a Saturday afternoon and queue up to go in the 'gods'. I think it was a shilling. We used to sit on the front row, which was just a bench, and watch various productions.

After friends in respondents' youth, work colleagues can sometimes be an influence. Kay says, "The girls that I worked with were keen to go and see musicals." Jack's theatregoing interest began with trips organized from work. He has become an avid theatregoer, saying, "Once you've been, you get the bug and you just can't stay away from it." Partners can either introduce someone to theatregoing or change the frequency with which they go. Karen's interest began "when I was first married . . . we went to see a few things and it developed from there". Bernard says, "Both of us have this interest in theatre . . . though my wife has probably more of an interest than I have, and she's introduced me more to it I think." In divorcing her husband who disliked theatregoing, Joan, of course, was then able to indulge her own interest. There have been two sources of influence in increasing Charles's theatregoing: the first is his wife, Beryl, and the second is his son and daughter-in-law. He explains:

> Since my marriage late in life, I was about fifty, we have attended theatres reasonably often. Really theatregoing has become more prevalent recently, since my son has become interested in theatre, eventually marrying an actress. So that's made quite a difference. Now we go fairly regularly to various theatres.

Gwen and Richard's daughter works as a theatre lighting technician, and they go to see London and touring productions in which she is involved. As Gwen says, "It's introduced us to a lot of fringe theatre, which we've found interesting . . . It's a door that she's opened for us." As we have seen, Louise had no early experience of theatre through her home life. Her introduction to theatre was through her own children, when they went to dancing lessons and participated in local productions. She says, "I went to watch them, helped in the background, and that's how it started really. So I was thirty before I became aware of the theatre." In the first two of these cases, it is likely that parents introduced their children to theatre initially, but in Louise's situation there is a reversal of the processes whereby parents introduce their children to cultural practices. Jill presents another similar case where introduction to theatregoing has not been through a parent taking a child. The person influencing her theatregoing is indeed her mother, but Jill, as an adult, has joined the female theatregoing group her mother organizes. Friendship has thus influenced her cultural practices as much as family.

Children can also have an indirect influence on their parent's theatregoing practices. Some respondents point out that, as their children grow up, they have more time to themselves in which to resume old interests or take up new ones. Respondents such as Kay, Barbara and Ruth, who were introduced to theatre as children, but then did not go for a number of years, have taken up their interest again when their children are old enough for them to go out more often. As Ruth says, "I had a long spell when I didn't go, when my children were little. Since they've grown up, I've been able to go as and when I've seen something that appeals to me." David, as a newcomer to theatregoing, describes how he might start to go more often now that his children have reached their teenage years.

> Now our children are growing up, the natural progression is to relax a bit and do things that you wouldn't normally have done before. Going to the theatre is one of them, so the fact that we enjoyed it could mean that we do that more often . . . It was a new experience for me and I

> enjoyed it. If I went again and didn't enjoy it, I could be fickle and be put off. I don't know.

After being introduced to live entertainment as a child, and more recently enjoying musicals, Rob discusses how he feels his tastes might develop, now that his children are in their late teenage years and he has more time.

> As you mature, perhaps your tastes change and develop, and you think I'd like to go to, say, The Octagon, and see what's on there. It's just being open to whatever's available really . . . I would like to extend my theatregoing to include more variety, a greater range. We enjoy musicals and could extend this by going to more serious productions, or opera and ballet. A lot of people appreciate these, so there must be something good there. As you get older you have more time, so you're open to receive new interests.

Like Rob, most respondents also go to forms of live entertainment other than theatre. For example, Bernard, Derek and Muriel are fond of classical music and enjoy concerts. Pam appreciated large-scale productions of opera and ballet when she lived in Sheffield. Jill and Julie, two of the younger respondents, also like stand-up comedy. Most respondents are old enough to have been introduced to live drama before they started to watch it on television, if they do. Julie, as a younger member of the sample, has acquired her theatregoing practices through another route. Her first experience of live performance was attending rock concerts. When she realized she could also see the comedy and drama she had watched on television in live form, she decided to explore that as well. She says, "Once you've seen something live, you realize how much is out there, and that there are other things you can see live." This foreshadows the discussion of the data on live and mediatized performance and audience experience. Before this I show how audience member respondents' previous theatregoing histories relating to Noël Coward and his plays *Private Lives* and *Blithe Spirit* impact on their theatregoing tastes and practices and community experience.

As we saw in the section on theatregoers' demographic profile, both actors and audience members wondered whether, in view of their response, the research audiences had a history with Noël Coward and the individual plays. Such histories would suggest a potential for interpretive communities based on the playwright or the

individual plays. Many of the audience member respondents for both plays had some experience of Noël Coward. This is especially so for the *Private Lives* respondents, and their comments range from an acknowledgement of familiarity with the playwright to statements showing great appreciation of his work. For example, Enid observes, "We're used to Noël Coward over the years, aren't we?" and Beryl says, "I like Noël Coward. I've seen . . . most of [his plays] . . . mainly in London theatres." Jack is an aficionado, saying, "Noël Coward plays are excellent and the story's excellent . . . his writing's fantastic." For Alice, the oldest respondent, "Noël Coward brings back memories for me . . . He's so well known. He is the theatre. In so many ways." Younger members of the *Private Lives* sample also appreciate Coward. Jill says, "I like the old-fashioned style. I'd seen other Noël Coward plays and thought they were good and quite amusing . . . [*Blithe Spirit* at The Octagon] was excellent. I really enjoyed that one." Susan's only previous experience of theatre had been this same production, and it had encouraged her to see *Private Lives* as well.

Not everyone in the *Private Lives* sample with previous experience of Coward was quite so enthusiastic. Ruth says, "I'm not very keen on Noël Coward, and if I'd been choosing something it wouldn't have been my first choice, but because we go regularly we went because that was what was on." Her companion on this theatre visit was Helen, who had a similar view:

> I didn't really like Noël Coward too much. I'd seen *Blithe Spirit* on television and found it very dated . . . I was curious about it, as I was when there was the Priestley season at The Octagon. I thought I ought to know about [these plays]. The enjoyment was a bonus.

This example shows how theatregoing as a regular practice can bring audience members to attend a performance they are slightly reluctant to see. Further, as in this case, it may prove a rewarding experience and influence a change in tastes. Among the *Private Lives* respondents, Rob admitted that he had no experience of the playwright: "Noël Coward's *Private Lives* didn't mean anything to me. I hadn't seen it before . . . It seemed an interesting story." Overall, the nature of previous experience of the playwright sets up expectations that can be positive or negative. These are open to change through attending another production of the playwright's

work. Even if there is no previous experience, what respondents hear about the playwright and production influences their expectations.

Among the *Blithe Spirit* audience member respondents there is not such extensive experience of Coward's plays as there is among the *Private Lives* respondents. However, none of this experience was negative. Joan and Richard, for example, both said they enjoyed Noël Coward's plays. Other respondents' expectations were based on his reputation. Pam said she knew about Noël Coward and thought *Blithe Spirit* would be interesting, and Sally felt that because it was written by Coward she "knew it was going to be witty and humorous and interesting". There is one comment by Louise, who had not seen any Noël Coward before, that she expected *Blithe Spirit* to be "stiff and starchy". Like Helen's unexpected enjoyment of *Private Lives*, Louise found that she was "entertained" and "pleasantly surprised".

In terms of experience of the plays themselves, only a few respondents in each sample had seen them before. These include Jack, the couple Beryl and Charles, and their companion for *Private Lives*, Alice. She says, " I've seen it before in the past . . . I loved it and wanted to see it again." For *Blithe Spirit*, Derek had seen the film, Barbara "vaguely remembered it from the television", but the couple Beth and Vic had seen an open-air production a few years ago. They had liked the play and wanted to compare the two productions. In summary, it is unsurprising, given Coward's prodigious output, that most respondents had some knowledge or experience of his work, and that a few had attended previous productions of the two plays. As suggested in the section on theatregoers' demographic profile, and developed in the next chapter on the interactions at theatre performances, such knowledge influences audience response and community experience. In view of the extensive nature of the data on audience member respondents' theatregoing life narratives, I draw an interim conclusion at this point.

Interim Conclusion: Theatregoers' Own Stories

It is clear from the data on respondents' own stories, that Bourdieu's concept of habitus does play an important role in explaining the development of theatregoing tastes and practices, especially where parents and other family members have

introduced respondents to theatre when they were children as part of their upbringing. This influence can set up lifelong theatregoing practices, and does tend to reproduce patterns of cultural consumption. It is also ongoing in that respondents often mention encouraging their own children and grandchildren to enjoy theatre. However, the data suggest a number of variations in Bourdieu's theory of how people acquire cultural practices, indicating that community experienced through tastes is not wholly connected to social class. First, the link between mainstream theatregoing and social class is not exclusively middle class in a bourgeois, upper middle class or élitist sense, as our lower middle class respondents' life narratives indicate. Additionally, respondents' tastes are broad and include experimental theatre. Thus, the exclusive link Bourdieu suggests between intellectuals and experimental theatre is also not upheld. Second, there are many other ways in which respondents have been influenced to take up theatregoing that are not closely linked to family and social class. They have been introduced to theatre through school, amateur dramatics, the people they meet during their life course, their own children, and other forms of live performance. Further, introduction to theatre is not everything. Frequency of theatregoing is important, and varies during respondents' lifetime according to influences such as, again, the people they spend more or less time with, whether their children are involved in drama, and also accessibility to theatres and available leisure time.

In terms of going to specific theatre productions, previous experience of playwrights' work impacts upon decisions to attend, and has the potential to produce interpretive communities in the audience based on the dramatist or the particular play. This, in turn, affects audience response and community formation and re-formation. Respondents sometimes attend even when previous experience, or the playwright's reputation, has negative overtones for them. Often this is simply because they are regular theatregoers. In these cases, the new experience can lead to a revision of tastes. Having examined the origins of respondents' theatregoing, and its varying patterns during the life course, the next section looks more closely at a particular area of respondents' life narratives, examining their views on live and mediatized performance and audience experience. I discuss how such experience has influenced

audience member respondents' choices of cultural consumption practices, and explore what it tells us about face-to-face and imagined community.

Live Actors or Screens?

In this section I address the issue of how far the mediatized audience experience substitutes or complements the experience of live drama. I draw a link between co-present and imagined audience community experience and community in the wider world. This takes on board especially, therefore, Williams's (1979, 1989b) and McGrath's (1996) differing ideas on live and televised drama, Bennett's (1997) and Brook's (1977) emphasis on audience input in theatre, and Baym's (2000) findings on the connection between offline and online lives. It relates to the work of Morley (2000) on face-to-face community, Urry (2000) on mobilities, and Putnam (2000) on both of these. In approaching these ideas, I first draw on how the actors see differences between live and mediatized performance. Following this, I discuss the audience member respondents' views on their experiences of live and mediatized production. I consider why they enjoy live rather than mediatized performance, what they dislike about mediatized production, and, finally, what aspects of mediatized production they do appreciate. I argue that differences between live and mediatized production affect the communication between actors and audience members, and among audience members, and thus influence processes of community formation.

Kate, one of the actors in *Private Lives*, makes an essential point about co-presence in theatre when she says, "Theatre is a live art form and [the audience] does get involved . . . in the theatre you are almost always invited in." Actors expect theatre audiences to participate actively. This contrasts with film and television viewing where, Kate suggests, "The demands made on you as an audience member are different. You're just asked to watch the film and judge it." Another actor in *Private Lives*, Ged, thinks that actors find it harder to involve a younger audience in live performances. He suggests that, because they have grown up with television, they come to the theatre expecting to watch passively and not to participate actively. For Penny, a *Blithe Spirit* actor, the immediacy of audience response in the theatre is "a tremendous feeling actually, and is quite elevating". She says,

> You don't want to feel you're doing something in isolation. That's the difference between film and the stage. To a certain extent, being in a film is not as satisfying because you don't get the response until you go to see the film you're in, or watch it on television.

For the actors, then, the audience input in the theatre that Bennett (1997) and Brook (1977) highlight is very important, and the immediacy of their response is something that is missing from performance in television and film.

Audience member respondents take up these ideas about active, involved participation by theatre audiences contrasted with a tendency towards more passive viewing for film and television. They also discuss the themes of immediacy of response and interaction with the performers. The idea of the active involvement of theatre audiences in the performance is especially significant for the concerns in the thesis with communication practices and processes of community formation. It underlines the co-present nature of theatre and the interaction that takes place there. The ideas expressed below confirm the importance of co-present interaction to respondents, supporting, with Morley (2000) and, largely, Putnam (2000), a view of community that emphasizes this feature. Respondents are sceptical that television and film can provide such quality experience. I discuss first audience members' ideas about this sense of involvement in live performance, and then consider some further views they have on why they enjoy live performance.

Respondents frequently make spontaneous comparisons with film or television. A powerful argument supporting audience members' enjoyment of theatre centres on their emphasis on the performers being, as Jill says, "real people". Barbara expands on this:

> What I like about theatre is that you can almost feel the actors' breath . . . it's real; it's happening right now . . . It's ok is the television, but you need some reality in your life. You need to get in touch with people again, even if they are acting a role.

This is described even more vividly by Vic, when he says, "I find theatre better than television because it's like being part of a big group. It's actually flesh and blood you're seeing on the stage." Being "part of" a live performance is mentioned by other respondents too. Joan says, " I love live performances, whatever type of performance

it is. I think if it's live you can feel part of it." By comparison with watching television, where you can easily switch channels, Derek points out that "if you've booked to go to the theatre, you go in there and you're part of it, and I like that".

Kay recognizes that immediacy of audience response and interaction between performers and audience encourage audience involvement in live performance. She says,

> There's nothing like [going to the theatre]; and it's the same with live music, concerts; it's that live performance. There's just something immediate about it, rather than a film . . . you do feel in tune with the people on the stage somehow, or you feel there is some interaction actually. [Performers] can respond to how the audience react, and likewise.

The concentration that respondents note is required to appreciate a theatre performance aids involvement. When Helen refers to people in theatre audiences who do not seem to her to be "regular theatregoers", she says, "They look as if they're not used to sitting there and being quiet and concentrating." In her support for introducing children to the theatre, Louise remarks,

> It's important to take children to the theatre because they've got to really concentrate. Children do activities nowadays, which don't require a lot of intense concentration. You can watch television, switch off, and watch back again. With the theatre, if they're going to get the best out of it, they've got to really listen and watch carefully.

Respondents comment on how involved they become in the different situations and worlds presented in the plays they watch. In terms of the situations that plays deal with, Sally finds,

> You've experienced it in a way you never could have if you hadn't been to see that production. You've almost experienced it as well because you get very involved. You feel as though you've had an experience that you wouldn't get anywhere else. You don't even get that from watching it on television either.

Similarly, Derek says he enjoys theatre because it "take[s] you out into a different world for a time; transport[s] you to something away from what you're doing. I suppose it's the same reason you go to the cinema, but theatre is much *more so*, because it's live" (emphasis added).

Looking now at some of the reasons other than involvement why audience member respondents appreciate live performance, and continuing with Derek's ideas about theatre, he says,

> I enjoy the whole craft of it: acting, costumes, the set . . . I admire so much the skill, the sheer skill. For a person who finds it difficult to remember his own postcode and telephone number, to remember lines, to me, is exceptional; and to go up there in front of all those people. I know a little bit of what it's like with singing. You have to come in at a certain time and you have to make it. So I feel admiration.

Other respondents also mention that they admire the actors' skills in live performance. Comparing live theatre to television, Jack finds,

> It's much more enjoyable than watching television. Live theatre is far better. The atmosphere. The whole thing. I really enjoy it. [Actors] can't cover their mistakes. I've watched good actors get themselves out of these things; it's quite clever really.

Similarly, Vic says, "Actors, when they're performing live, they've got to 'ad lib'. That's what I like about theatre. It's live and you're part of it."

The idea of actors having to "cover their mistakes" and "'ad lib'" in live performance foreshadows another aspect of respondents' enjoyment of theatre. This is the element of risk or chance in watching live performance. As Helen puts it, "There's something about a live performance, whether it's music or drama, that's different to television. There's always that feeling, 'Is it going to come off?'" Beryl highlights the chance factor in going to the theatre. She says, "When you go to a wide variety of things, sometimes you come away disappointed. On the other hand, there are productions that you wouldn't have missed for the world." These ideas emphasize the human dimension of theatre, what Eyre (Eyre and Wright 2000) refers to as the human scale, and again, supporting Morley (2000) and Putnam (2000), suggest the importance of co-presence to community experience.

In comparing audience experiences of television and theatre, respondents highlight what it is about the mediatized experience that they feel is less conducive to community formation than theatregoing. Beryl emphasizes the centrality of the use of the imagination when attending theatre. She says,

> Theatre is still down to one's imagination. With so much television today, theatregoers are not as many as they used to be because people don't want to use their imagination. On television this is all done for them . . . You have to use some imagination all the time in the theatre.

Both Pam and Sally enjoy drama on the radio, where similarly much is left to the imagination. Sally says she finds "the drama on radio better than the drama on television". Use of the imagination is also a vital part of reading. Pam and Joan enjoy reading, and Beryl again says, "I don't think people read like they used to read." She adds, "[My mother] used to read aloud to me an awful lot as a child. It was a treat I looked forward to."

As mentioned in the section on life narratives, respondents enjoy other kinds of live performance, especially classical music. The two youngest respondents, Jill and Julie, like rock concerts and stand-up comedy. There is an abundance of live art in Cumbria, including, as Pam says, hand bell ringing, choral singing and poetry readings. Muriel makes a pertinent point about the difference between listening to classical music on the radio and attending a live concert.

> The music the Northern Sinfonia play is often something I've never heard before. It's nice to be able to sit down and really listen to it. If you're listening to music on the radio, it's background music and you're not really focused on it. That's one reason why I enjoy those concerts.

This supports the suggestion made by Tulloch (1990) and Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) that television, like radio, is now often on in the background rather than watched attentively. Jean mentions the recent re-make of *The Forsyte Saga* on television, saying, "It wasn't anything like the original. I mean for twenty-six weeks we never did anything on a Sunday night but watch *The Forsyte Saga*, because there was no recording in those days." At that time, especially, people watched television drama 'as if' they were in the theatre.

If Jean was unimpressed by the re-make of *The Forsyte Saga*, so too was Beth, and both of them comment on the lack of drama on television. What respondents particularly dislike about mediatized production is viewers' lack of

attentiveness and passivity contrasted with their concentration and active involvement in live production. Enid is succinct about her preference for theatre over television.

> We don't just want to be passive television viewers. It's nice to be there . . . [Going to the theatre] puts you off seeing some of the rubbish that goes on television. You soon turn the knob off . . . If you've been used to going to the theatre, you're a bit more discriminating about what you watch on television.

Helen noted the presence in theatre audiences of people who do not seem to be regular theatregoers because they do not concentrate. This is supported by Vic's experience. He finds that "sometimes when you go to the theatre you'd think people were watching television, and they're going to get up in the middle and make a cup of tea". Barbara further emphasizes the passivity of mediatized production audiences. She observes that "everything now is sort of 'fed' to people, even kids' games". A number of respondents express specific dislikes about television. David comments, "A lot of television is harrowing really", and Pam and her husband, who have both retired early from stressful jobs, have opted not to have a television at all. Gwen extends her dislike of television to screens generally, saying, "I'm not a screen person. I don't like television much. I don't watch television because I don't like screens." Respondents therefore show some antipathy towards television and the audience experience it offers. There is little suggestion that they feel any sense of community through watching the performers in mediatized production, neither do they intimate that they feel part of imagined audience communities. This indicates that for these regional theatregoers, at least, the different kinds of community through mobilities that Urry (2000) suggests are not easily accessed.

There are, however, a number of areas of television production that respondents do appreciate. Most of them very much enjoy the classical costume dramas produced for television. Bernard sums up this view, saying, "We enjoyed the Jane Austens. I thought *Pride and Prejudice* was absolutely marvellous . . . [They have also put on] Dickens and George Eliot. I think these sort of things are usually done very well on television." Respondents also look out for television dramas written by playwrights they admire. Ruth, for example, enjoys Alan Bennett's work, and Marjorie likes Kay Mellor's plays. At the time of interviewing, a contemporary political drama, *State of Play*, was being screened on Sunday evenings. Several

respondents were watching this and thought it was very good. Consumption of other television drama appears to be low, although a few respondents mentioned that they like police dramas, mysteries and thrillers. In television drama, respondents look out for a good storyline, well written dialogue and convincing acting. In short, what they like about television is similar in content, and playwriting and acting skills, to what they appreciate in their theatregoing.

There are other television programmes that respondents enjoy, and these are often supplementary to their theatregoing. Both Vic and David enjoy biographical programmes about actors, and Helen likes the opportunity to 'meet' performers through television. Beryl has been watching programmes providing background to theatre, such as details of touring productions and inside information on how different actors prepare for performances in their dressing rooms. These examples contribute to Urry's (2000) discussion on how 'personalities' are brought into the home through an informal style of television. There is no doubt that these respondents appreciate the reduction of distance between actors and audiences that such programmes facilitate. In these cases respondents are watching television to support their theatregoing practices. They are therefore using mediatized cultural consumption to complement their theatregoing, which is in agreement with Putnam's (2000) suggestion that "mediated communication will turn out to *complement*, not *replace*, face-to-face communities (179, emphasis in original). In terms of community experience, however, respondents' mediatized consumption is a poor substitute, which runs counter to Urry's (2000) support for the idea that mobilities and imagined communities are now significant and salient. Comparing respondents' experiences here with Baym's (2000) findings that online community relating to mediatized production connects to people's offline lives, in my data there is also a connection, in this case between offline live performance attendance and mediatized production. The differences arise through the two research projects having different starting points, Baym's beginning with online audience communities and my own with live performance audiences, but the general point remains the same and confirms some connection between online, or mediatized, and offline lives.

Despite Williams's (1979, 1989b) view that television drama production can improve upon live drama through form and technique, there is little evidence among the respondents that their mediatized audience experience provides the quality experience that live drama can offer. It encourages neither the community formation that is possible through co-present interaction in the theatre, nor, mostly, any other way of experiencing community. The community experience generated for these respondents at live drama supports McGrath's (1996) view that theatre can scrutinize reality more effectively than mediatized production not only by telling "a different story . . . from that received on the television screen", but also because it involves and engages audiences in its themes. Having already given an interim conclusion on how respondents have become theatregoers through the data on their own stories, below I conclude this section on their preferences relating to live and mediatized performance and audience experience, and suggest how this underpins community experience.

Conclusion: Live Actors or Screens?

In conclusion, respondents perceive clear differences between live and mediatized performance and audience experience. For them the live audience experience requires active participation. Immediacy of audience response generates interaction between performer and audience, which produces involvement. Respondents see the mediatized performance experience as isolating, and the audience experience as passive. The live audience experience features concentration as opposed to lack of attentiveness in the mediatized experience. Respondents say their involvement in the different situations and worlds presented by drama is heightened by live performance. Live performance acting skills attract greater admiration than mediatized skills, where re-recording and editing take place. There is always the possibility of an exceptional live performance, since each one is unique, whereas a recorded performance remains the same. Respondents highlight the use of imagination at the theatre. This also features in their enjoyment of radio drama and reading, but they remark on its absence in television consumption. There is criticism of the lack of drama on television and the quality of the drama that is screened. However, respondents do appreciate television classical costume dramas and plays that are similar to theatre drama in content, and writing and acting skills. They also watch programmes that provide background to their interest in theatre. For these respondents the mediatized

audience experience of drama therefore complements their live experience. This finding is generally in agreement with Baym's (2000) view of how her respondents' online lives connect with their offline lives.

These differences that respondents see between live and mediatized audience experience have strong implications for communication processes and a sense of community. In live performance, communication between actor and audience is interpersonal, between "real people", rather than between an actor on a screen and audience members. Respondents say they feel "part of" live performances, and they are co-present with other audience members in larger numbers than when they watch television. Overall, respondents express some antipathy to the mediatized audience experience. I suggest that, among these respondents, the face-to-face community they experience at theatre and other kinds of live performance surpasses any experiences of community they may have had through mediatized audience experiences of these genres. Considering Urry's (2000) question of whether imagined communities can supplant face-to-face community, this is not the case for the theatregoers in the sample. Respondents' consumption of live drama, and the sense of community this can produce through audience input, involvement and feeling part of the event, supports rather Morley's (2000) emphasis on the continuing importance of face-to-face community, and Putnam's (2000) view that interpersonal communication provides a foundation stone in building social capital.

In the first two sections of this chapter on theatregoers' contexts, I have discussed how the data on respondents' demographic profile, their life narratives, and their experience of live and mediatized performance contribute to understanding the formation of community. In the third and final section, I discuss audience member respondents' social networks in terms of both their theatregoing and their other cultural consumption and activities. I highlight the importance of interpersonal communication, and relate the data to community formation and experience.

The Importance of Interpersonal Communication

Here I discuss the data relating to the audience member respondents' social networks, considering their theatregoing companions, and the interpersonal aspects of their

other cultural consumption and activities. The main concept I employ in the argument is social capital, and how it can illuminate the construction of community. I focus especially on Putnam's (2000) view of the importance of interpersonal communication in building social capital. Peterson and Kern's (1996) omnivore thesis, questioning Bourdieu's class-related distinction of taste, underpins the analysis of respondents' cultural consumption and activities overall. I discuss whether respondents are omnivore or univore in relation to both their cultural consumption and their other activities, how these patterns relate to social class, and how they reflect on processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Small Groups of Likeminded People

Respondents frequently have regular arrangements with their theatregoing companions. This produces smaller interpersonal groups within both the audience for a particular performance and the wider theatregoing population. In these groups individuals experience the "norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" that Putnam (2000:19) refers to as arising from the social networks that build social capital. Theatregoing groups are often formed on bases such as gender, genre or venue, and the characteristics of such groups provide a foundation for building social capital and community. Going to the theatre is something that couples do, but often these couples attend as part of wider groups of people. As noted in Chapter Four, twenty-one of the respondents went to the research performances as part of a couple, but of these only five say they go to the theatre solely with their partner. More often couples also attend with other family members, friends, or, especially in the Lake District, visitors. Rob, for example, says, "We've got two teenage boys, so sometimes we go as a family", and Bernard relates,

> When we've had friends staying, we've sometimes taken them to the theatre. We went to the Christmas production [at Theatre by the Lake] with other members of my wife's family who are living here . . . We also go with my brother-in-law who lives here too. Members of the family. Visitors as well.

Another quite common arrangement is for two couples to go to the theatre together. Two of the Theatre by the Lake respondents, Louise and Kay, are the female halves of two couples who holiday together regularly in Keswick, and a visit to the theatre is

always part of their holiday. When they are at home, Louise has a variety of arrangements for theatre visits.

> We would go with other friends, or sometimes on our own, sometimes with the girls. I have taken Mum and Dad on occasions, so anybody who is around at the time and wants to go really.

Enid usually goes to the theatre with her husband, but they are Friends of the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester, and go to this venue regularly with another couple. Similarly, Beryl and Charles always go to The Octagon with Alice, but go to other venues in Manchester, Sheffield and elsewhere with other friends or family.

Among the respondents, being a member of Friends of theatre groups does not lead to theatregoing with these groups. Like Enid and her membership of the Friends of the Royal Exchange Theatre, Louise is a member of the Friends of one of her local theatres. In both cases they receive and take advantage of advance publicity and booking facilities, but do not go on any outings or theatre visits with these groups. Their membership is more a matter of supporting that particular theatre. Rather, the larger theatregoing groups that respondents belong to are organized on an informal basis. In these groups respondents experience the interpersonal communication that builds social capital. Several respondents, for example Kay and Jack, mention theatre visits from their workplace, and Rob says groups have been arranged through their church. Karen and Jim attend as a couple with a larger group of between twelve and twenty theatregoers, which is organized by one of the couples in this group. At *Private Lives* there was a coach party from another northern town, which had been arranged by a retired couple. My informant about this group is Jean, who attended *Private Lives* alone. She had chatted with two members of the coach party in the interval, discovering that they travel “all over” and wishing there were a similar group in her own home town.

A salient type of theatregoing group is female-based, and there are several examples among the respondents. They show how gender can be a basis for community formation. In their discussion of gender and audience processes, Radway (1991), Kippax (1988) and Stacey (1994) all focus on women’s escape from their domestic worlds through cultural consumption. None of these writers emphasize

community experience through sharing tastes and interests, which is a major concern in this thesis. However, my data on female theatregoing groups build on their discussions of women's emotional involvement with characters in novels, film stars and arts' performances. The focus on community in my research shows that emotional involvement for these female theatregoers is not only on an individual level. Community formation is through sharing emotional involvement in the plays they see together as well as through sharing tastes and interests. I discuss this issue further in Chapter Seven on changes in audience perception.

All the members of these female theatregoing groups are, or have been, married. They comprise women whose husbands are not particularly interested in theatre, like Jill; women who were married but are now widowed, like Muriel, or divorced, like Ruth; women whose husbands are away working, as in Sally's case; and those who go to a particular venue with other women, as Jenny does to Theatre by the Lake, although she also goes to the local amateur dramatic theatre and London theatres with her husband. Referring to this last group, Jenny says her husband wouldn't want to go to Theatre by the Lake with them "because it's a girls' thing". In none of these cases are women escaping from their domestic worlds. More often they are seeking community experience through the shared tastes, interests and emotional involvement that their cultural consumption offers.

This argument is also true for the groups of female theatregoers that I discuss next, and here too I begin to extend Bourdieu's ideas on tastes and class. The group of six women that Jill goes to The Octagon with is organized by her mother, who books season tickets for all the main productions. They go to the whole season, and only meet up when they go to the theatre. Helen and Ruth are friends who have been going to The Octagon together recently, taking it in turns to book the tickets. There is sometimes a third member in their group, and Ruth also attends The Octagon with a male friend from London, when he is visiting. Helen says, "If [Ruth] didn't want to go to one [play], I would go with someone else." Respondents thus seek companions for particular productions according to tastes they have in common. The theatregoing groups that form according to taste among the sample, comprising females only and both males and females, reach across the spectrum of the middle class. This indicates

that taste itself, rather than, as Bourdieu suggests, class or class fraction, is the basis on which these groups are formed. To hold fast to Bourdieu's findings, only the middle and upper middle classes would attend mainstream theatre. As I argue later in this section, respondents in this research extend not only down through the lower middle class, but their tastes are also eclectic, reaching well beyond mainstream theatre, and there are no direct links between class fractions and tastes.

Making arrangements with companions according to taste, and also venue, is evident in the group of four women who regularly attend Theatre by the Lake together. Muriel, Joan, Sally and Marjorie all attend the season's productions in the main house, but Joan and Sally also go to a number of productions in the Studio, because they find that these often more experimental performances appeal to them. All the members of this group attend productions elsewhere either with another member or with other companions altogether. For example, Muriel goes to amateur shows and Gilbert and Sullivan productions with "other people"; Joan says, "Marjorie and I might go to something in Blackpool or Edinburgh, or Muriel and I might go to something else"; and Sally also goes to the theatre with her mother and her daughter, or her sister, echoing Louise when she says, "It depends what's on and who's interested." Marjorie says that Muriel has introduced her to "a little bit of opera and to ballet". She draws attention to "the social aspect [of going to the theatre]", saying simply, "it's nice to be out with friends". Underlying this is the importance of interpersonal contact and communication, "the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness", to the building of social capital and community. In the next section I pursue further the contribution of social capital to community formation through a consideration of respondents' other cultural consumption and activities.

More Interpersonal Interaction

For the purposes of discussion of the data in this section, I define cultural consumption as those practices where respondents are part of any kind of audience, and activities as those practices where they are engaged in the active pursuit of a hobby or interest. This is in no way to deny that audiences can be active. Thus, for example, attendance at a musical show is cultural consumption, but participation in an amateur operatic society is an activity. I continue the theme of social capital and

its relation to community formation, and then consider how respondents' overall pattern of cultural consumption and activities reflects on the omnivore/univore thesis. First, I discuss respondents' cultural consumption and activities other than theatregoing that are potentially high in their capacity to build social capital. These are practices such as attendance at or participation in live performance generally, activities as couples, and membership of societies, clubs and groups. Second, I look at the cultural consumption and activities respondents pursue that generate perhaps a lower level of social capital. These are practices such as mediatized consumption, computer use, and individual pursuits like reading. I comment on levels of social capital throughout, and finally I also comment on whether respondents tend to be omnivore or univore in their cultural consumption and activities.

Respondents' experiences of live performance, as discussed in the section on live and mediatized audience experience, suggest that live performance is high in social capital through the interpersonal communication and interactions that take place at such events. I have already noted that respondents attend live performances of genres other than theatre, and that some respondents either used to perform live themselves, or still do. Here, therefore, I summarize such cultural consumption and activities, and suggest that their importance in respondents' lives is through the social capital and community experience they provide. Many respondents attend live performances of music, and classical concerts are very much to the fore here, but rock concerts also feature in the younger respondents' lives. A few Theatre by the Lake respondents like to go to performances of opera and ballet, whereas a similar number of The Octagon respondents enjoy 'the big musicals'. The younger respondents again like stand-up comedy, whereas one Theatre by the Lake respondent is enjoying the live performances of hand bell ringing and poetry readings that Cumbria offers. In terms of their own live performance, Alice and Louise have both performed in amateur dramatics in the past; Jim used to play the trombone, and Jack continues to play the clarinet and saxophone; Derek participated in choral singing before he moved to Cumbria; and Pam currently sings in a choir.

Although Jill is a member of a female theatregoing group, she and her husband go to rock bands and stand-up comedy together. Other respondents also

pursue activities as couples, which does in itself build social capital. These include eating out, entertaining, walking, and church activities. Gardening is done sometimes as a couple and sometimes as an individual; for Kay, it is her "passion". Couples can also be members of the same societies. For instance, Gwen and Richard both belong to the Cumberland Geological Society and the Cumbria Industrial History Society. Visits to and from family are part of most respondents' lives, and time is spent with grandchildren where respondents have them. These are all seen as mutually supportive rather than burdensome. Holidays, too, are regular features for most respondents, usually comprising one main annual holiday, often abroad, and one or two 'short breaks' during the year as well. These are taken with family or friends and, like activities as a couple, also provide social capital through interpersonal communication.

As individuals, respondents belong to a wide variety of groups that offer an opportunity to build social capital. Among Theatre by the Lake respondents, these include a book group and meetings for societies such as History Societies, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Soroptimists and the Chamber of Trade. Classes and sports feature more in The Octagon respondents' lives. Male respondents here have football and badminton as sporting interests, while female respondents go to yoga and aerobics for example. These respondents also mention a computer class, a music class, being a heritage guide and voluntary work. Membership of these societies, groups and classes is not simply 'card-carrying': it involves active participation and interaction with others.

Turning now to respondents' consumption and activities that perhaps do not offer quite so much in terms of social capital, I begin by considering their consumption of mediatized production other than the drama I covered in the section on live and mediatized audience experience. I look first at respondents' cinema, radio and television consumption, which can take place together with other people, and second at activities that do not involve interpersonal interaction, such as computer use, reading, and the other interests they pursue on an individual basis. In general respondents are less enthusiastic about these pursuits, and take them up less

frequently, than is the case for the cultural consumption and activities in the discussion above, which I have argued are high in the social capital they offer.

Cinema and radio do not feature greatly in these respondents' lives. Four of the couples say that they go to the cinema occasionally, but it is not a regular activity like their theatregoing. Radio, other than the drama mentioned previously, is not an important part of their lives either, although one or two respondents say they listen to Radio Four or to music on the radio. As far as television is concerned, Gwen has declared her dislike of screens generally, Jack "can't stand" daytime television, and Enid and Jean watch very little. Most respondents do watch some television other than drama, but there is not much enthusiasm for this, and it tends to be something they do when there is nothing else to do. Beryl, Charles and Sally, for example, say they watch television more in the winter when there is less gardening or other outdoor activity, Louise and her husband watch occasionally, and Susan and David watch television "to relax". Alice has difficulty reading now because of her poor eyesight, so she watches television more than she used to, and Ruth says she does watch a lot in the evenings. Specific television programmes enjoyed by individual respondents are *Operatunity*, which Helen says she watches, and, unusually for these respondents, the quiz shows and house 'makeover' programmes that Jenny likes. Other than the couples, none of the respondents mention watching television in groups or discussing television programmes with others.

Similarly, respondents' computer use is limited. Eight of the respondents have no computer at home. Only two of these are employed and they do use a computer at work. A further seven respondents have a computer at home but do not use it. For example, Barbara and Derek have one, but it is not "rigged up" yet, and Derek says, "I've no idea how to use it." Liz admits she is "absolutely useless" on the computer, and Annette says her husband has a computer, but she "keep[s] out of that area altogether". In all, then, fifteen respondents are quite happy not to use a home computer. Eleven respondents use their home computers for purposes such as study, email and general information. This leaves only six respondents who use the computer from time to time to access theatre websites, book tickets online or obtain information about theatre and drama. Of these, Jill and Julie, the younger

respondents, have booked tickets online, Alice has used the computer to find out general information about theatres, Jenny has checked out the plot of a Shakespearean play, and Jean accesses the websites of theatres primarily in the Northwest of England for interest's sake. The final respondent here, Ruth, makes the most use of her computer for theatre-related matters. She looks on the Internet for play reviews and news about theatres in the Northwest. She emails friends generally, and this includes her theatregoing friend from London. She says, "I always send him an email when I've been to see something, and add a bit of a review, so that he knows what he's missing." None of the respondents mention 'posting' review comments to theatre websites, or participating in online theatre discussion groups. That is, other than the emails, there is no interaction of any sort.

Looking now at the individual pursuit of reading, again only a few respondents mention that they read for pleasure, fulfilling Beryl's comment that people nowadays do not "read like they used to read". When asked specifically whether they read theatre reviews, this generally produced a more positive response, and some interesting comments on what these are worth and what respondents appreciate about them. Seven respondents do not read theatre reviews at all. Karen says, "I just go by what I see, who's in it, and I'll take a chance." A further three respondents read reviews occasionally, and Liz and Rob only keep up with reviews of what is on locally. Vic also reads local reviews but says he does not "put too much into them". Fifteen respondents read reviews regularly in local and national newspapers, and several of these say they read the weekend theatre review sections. Of these, Jenny adds that she keeps up with what is on in London. The remaining four respondents are enthusiastic about their review reading. Enid says, "I never miss them", and Beryl reads them "avidly". Alice reads reviews especially to follow the careers of the young actors she knows, and Sally says,

> Often I know quite a lot about what's going on in London just because I read the reviews . . . I read about *Blithe Spirit* in the local paper before I went to see it. It didn't affect whether I went or not, but it was interesting to see what someone thought about it.

Like Jenny, Sally keeps up with London theatre, but, unlike Vic, she finds reviews interesting. Reading theatre reviews is similar to watching television drama or

programmes about theatre in that it supplements respondents' theatregoing. It is important to mention those activities respondents choose to pursue as individuals: that is they enjoy doing them alone. Gwen, Jack and Julie are all studying part-time for degrees. Another four respondents enjoy arts and crafts: Barbara is a sculptor, Derek is a painter and potter, Sally paints and weaves, and Jenny makes greetings cards.

Finally in this section, I comment on how far respondents tend to be omnivore or univore in their overall cultural consumption and activities. There is a tendency among these respondents to be univore in their theatregoing. Their mediatized cultural consumption is limited, except where it supports their theatregoing, such as when they watch television drama and read theatre reviews. Live classical music is also important in some respondents' lives. Yet, even with this interest added to theatregoing, this sample of respondents is not élitist as Bourdieu indicates theatregoers are: there is no sense of snobbery or exclusion as far as they are concerned. At the same time, univorous consumption of theatre among the respondents encompasses a wide range of tastes in genre and type of theatre, whether mainstream or experimental. This supports Williams's (1976) questioning of whether there is any clear distinction between high and low culture, and Eyre's (Eyre and Wright 2000) view that storytelling takes precedence over any division between mainstream and experimental theatre. While respondents' consumption of theatre genres and types is eclectic, it tends to be primarily local, extending for some respondents to other theatres in the Northwest of England and occasionally London theatres. There is no reference among them to global productions, and so a review of Lamont's (1994) "national cultural repertoires" would indicate that this sample of theatregoers does not look very much to the national scene and not at all to the global scene for their cultural references. While Lamont shows that Americans as a nation are generally culturally tolerant and the French are culturally exclusive, my respondents' levels of cultural tolerance tend to be produced locally and are generally inclusive.

There are two respondents who are outstanding in their tendency to be univore in their consumption of theatre. Sally, who goes to Theatre by the Lake about eight times a year, and to theatres in London and elsewhere, says, "It's what I do more than

anything else. It's my first choice activity . . . Theatre is my main activity. I prefer it to all other things." The other example is Jack, who always buys season tickets for plays at The Octagon. He says, with some dramatic licence, "If there was a different play on every night, I would go every night." Where other studies have indicated that univorous consumption is linked to the lower class (Peterson and Simkus 1992, Bryson 1997), my data here show that it can also extend into the range of the middle class.

In terms of activities, rather than cultural consumption, respondents tend to be omnivore, enjoying a wide range of pursuits. What is important to respondents about these activities is that they offer interpersonal interaction and "the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" to which Putnam refers. There are two respondents, one from each theatre, who are fine examples of these busy social lives. First Rob, from The Octagon sample, says,

> We are very involved in the church, two or three nights a week and meetings on Sundays. I enjoy the garden, looking after the home and the two boys. We enjoy walking and I play badminton one night a week. I'm chairman of the social committee at work. We do like eating out as well. Weekends away.

The second example here is Louise from the Theatre by the Lake sample. She describes her social life as follows:

> We do go out, either to the cinema or to the theatre. Watch some television. Weekends we tend to go out for meals. I also do a lot of cooking and people come round. When the weather's really good I'm in the garden, or we go off to local beauty spots . . . [I belong to] the local civic society. I'm a Friend of the local school, both primary and secondary, so I help out there. I also belong to a local church women's group that raises funds for charities.

In summary, there is a tendency for respondents to be univore in their cultural consumption of theatre, and omnivore in their pursuit of a wide variety of other activities in the course of their busy everyday lives. There is no hint of theatregoing as an exclusive practice, and every indication of inclusion across all their cultural consumption and activities.

Conclusion: The Importance of Interpersonal Communication

Concluding this section on the importance of interpersonal communication, theatregoing companions provide the social networks important to building social capital and community experience for these respondents, who have regular social arrangements for going to the theatre. Couples attend, certainly, but they often go with other family members, friends or visitors. Larger theatregoing groups are organized on an informal basis, through the workplace, church, or simply by one of the couples involved. Informal groups of female theatregoers are salient, and encourage community formation based on gender and sharing interests, tastes and emotional involvement in theatre. Escape from their domestic worlds through cultural consumption, as described by Radway (1991), Kippax (1988) and Stacey (1994), does not feature as a reason for theatregoing among these groups. While theatregoing arrangements are regular, they are also flexible, whereby respondents go together to particular productions or venues according to their tastes. Community formation can thus occur based on tastes certainly, but also with the finer tuning of production or venue. In summary, it is not only the play that matters to respondents but also the "social aspect" of their theatregoing, which builds social capital and community experience.

Respondents' cultural consumption and activities other than theatregoing offer varying levels of social capital. Those with a high level include attending live performances of other genres, especially music, and respondents' own live performance. The varied activities respondents have, especially membership of societies, attending classes, time spent with families and holidays, are also high in social capital. However, consumption of mediatized production other than drama is low, and appears to offer little social capital. Computer use is also low and produces a negligible level of social capital. Respondents choose a number of activities that are intrinsically individual pursuits, which they are happy to engage in alone. They read very little, except that there is substantial interest in reading theatre reviews, which is similar to their mediatized consumption of drama in that it supplements and supports their theatregoing.

By making a distinction between cultural consumption and activities, and looking at a sample of theatregoers, I have been able to examine the omnivore/univore thesis on a micro level, which has produced some interesting variations on Peterson and Simkus's (1992), Peterson and Kern's (1996) and Bryson's (1997) earlier research and analysis. I conclude that my respondents have a tendency to be univore in their cultural consumption, but omnivore in their activities. They cover a wide range of the middle class and so do not conform to the idea of the upper middle class being omnivorous in their cultural consumption and activities. By the same token, their univorous consumption of theatre does not support the idea of low status cultural exclusiveness. While their theatregoing may be described as univorous cultural consumption, their tastes within theatre are broad. The data offer illustrations of both lower middle class consumption of high theatre art, for example Shakespeare, and upper middle class consumption of popular theatre culture, for example 'kitchen sink' drama, supporting Williams's (1976) and later Eyre's (Eyre and Wright 2000) idea that there is no real divide between high and low culture. As I have already argued, respondents enjoy both mainstream and experimental theatre, and it is not possible to ally mainstream consumption with "bourgeois" theatregoers and experimental theatre with "intellectual" theatregoers, as Bourdieu (2000) indicates. Neither are respondents part of an élite group: there is no sense of theatregoing as a snobbish and exclusive class-based pursuit; it is simply a large part of their cultural consumption. They seek out live performance, and especially theatre, because through this they find the interpersonal contact and community experience that is important to them. Similarly, in their omnivorous pursuit of activities, respondents find fulfilment through active participation and interacting with other people.

Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the data on the multiplicity of contexts that respondents' social and theatregoing backgrounds offer, showing how they provide bases for the construction of community. I have considered actors' and theatregoers' ideas about who goes to the theatre in terms of age, gender, and social class, both for theatre audiences generally and at the two research performances. I have then discussed how audience member respondents have become theatregoers, first through

their theatregoing life narratives, and second by comparing their audience experiences of live and mediatized production. The actor respondents make an important contribution to this debate through their own experience of live and mediatized performance. Finally, I have discussed audience member respondents' social networks, outlining their arrangements with theatregoing companions, and considering their cultural consumption and activities other than theatregoing, in order to assess sources of social capital and the extent to which respondents are omnivore or univore. I have commented on aspects of social inclusion and exclusion where they arise, especially from the demographic and the cultural consumption data. The data presented in this chapter are both extensive and intensive, and provide a substantial part of the context of audience member respondents' theatre consumption. The main finding to emerge from this chapter is the importance of interpersonal communication to respondents' experience of community. In the next chapter, I move on from audience context to discuss respondents' experiences of live theatre performances, the co-present social interactions that take place there, and their import for community formation.

CHAPTER SIX
CO-PRESENCE AND COMMUNITY

Introduction

Chapter Five has highlighted the importance of interpersonal communication to respondents' community experience. The co-presence of actors and audience at theatre performances enables a focus on the interactions taking place there, to see what sort of communication encourages community formation or tends to produce exclusion. As I have discussed in Chapters Two and Three, audience response reflects the interactions taking place during performances, and I focus on this feature to illuminate communication processes and community experience. I relate my data to Bennett's (1997) ideas on audience response, to previous work by Atkinson (1984) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) on applause at political meetings, and to Jefferson's (1979) study of laughter in everyday interaction. I develop the argument on how community is experienced through Putnam's (2000) discussion on interpersonal communication, seeing where the data corroborate his ideas and where they extend them. Thus, the features of interactions at theatre performances are carried over to interpersonal communication in everyday life to see whether they can shed light on processes of community formation. I also develop Goffman's (1990) work on the relationship between acting and interaction in everyday life by detailing some of the processes common to both. I discuss the data first on the interpersonal interaction between audience and actors, and second on the collective interaction among audience members.

Third in this chapter, I discuss respondents' ideas on the influence of theatre spaces on audience response, bearing in mind here also that the auditorium is another important aspect of audience context. Atkinson's (1984) and Heritage and Greatbatch's (1986) work focused on political meetings in large halls, and I extend their research by considering the influence of different sizes and shapes of auditoria on audience response. I argue that physical contexts influence interpersonal communication, contributing to community formation or producing exclusion, both in the theatre and in everyday life. Throughout the chapter I relate the data to Bennett's (1997) and theatre practitioners' ideas on audiences, their response, and the nature and influence of auditoria. In the conclusion I draw out the features of co-present

interaction and the characteristics of auditoria at theatre performances that encourage a sense of community and those that do not. I relate them to communication processes and community experience in everyday life.

Interpersonal Interaction

Both audience members and actors thought that response at the research performances was very good, as indeed from my own observations it was. This need not have been the case, but it does facilitate, for this research, an understanding of the communication processes that encourage a sense of community. This leads, therefore, to a focus on inclusion rather than exclusion, which is more in evidence where response is poor. In this section I look at respondents' ideas about the nature of the interaction dynamic between audience and actors, and the nature of audience response, both generally and at the research performances. I discuss how the comedy genre and the actors' technique make the text work by supporting the interaction between audience and actors. Finally, I consider some views of how interaction at theatre performances can be more problematic. As I discussed in Chapter One, Putnam (2000) highlights the richness of the medium of interpersonal communication, which includes speed and depth of feedback and non-verbal messages. I draw attention to these features as the discussion progresses. Illustrations of how interactions between actors and audiences relate to interactions in everyday life also develop Goffman's (1990) work. The actors were especially forthcoming on their interactions with the audience, and this arises from their concern that in theatre, as Brook (1977) says, and I discussed in Chapter Three in connection with theatre as an art form, "the audience completes the steps of creation" (142).

A "Dynamic"

In light of the idea of depth of feedback in interpersonal interaction, Nigel, one of the *Blithe Spirit* actors, compares the previous evening's audience response with that at the research performance. He notes that in the first case the audience "had been very, very attentive, but they didn't take part . . . [whereas at the research performance] the audience really did make their presence felt". He describes this difference between the two audiences as being "a conversation between us and them, rather than just between [the actors]", and comments that this made the performance "particularly

enjoyable". He thinks of the audience as "the other part of the contract, if you like", and describes the interaction between audience and actors as "a tension, a dynamic". Alice, an audience member at *Private Lives*, gives her view of this interaction as follows:

> It's a one-to-one relationship between the actors and the audience. You have to be together on the same wavelength . . . They're sharing the experience. That's how I look at it.

Another actor in *Blithe Spirit*, Penny, describes the dynamic between audience and actors through audience response. She observes that the research performance audience were "very perceptive and were prepared to give something of themselves as well". She says that when "the audience is getting something from the performance . . . the actors feed from that. The audience know the actors are feeding from it and respond to it". That sort of interaction she finds "absolutely joyous . . . it just ripples right through from the stage right out to the auditorium".

Both Penny and Ged, an actor in *Private Lives*, indicate the importance of the audience listening as well as responding. This is especially important in playing verbal humour, such as that in Noël Coward's plays. Penny says the actors know when the audience is listening "because they 'get' the little innuendos in the dialogue". She also highlights the importance of appropriate silence in the audience, citing one of her own scenes in *Blithe Spirit*.

> There's an interesting thing that happens with the dialogue that Charles and I have together, the big row. It's quite forceful and quite strident, but it has some of the most fantastic jokes built into it. You're really aware that people have to listen carefully, because it's coming at them hard and fast. That quality of their silence as well really supports you, so that you're able to deliver the comedy lines to their full benefit.

This indicates that the interaction between audience and actors features more than just audible response, and suggests that listening and silence are also important during everyday communication between people. I discuss below respondents' own ideas about the nature of audience response.

"You Can't Hear a Smile"

Ged describes the manifest and latent features of audience response succinctly when he says that it's easier to have a dialogue with the audience in comedies because you can hear the laughter, but "laughter is not the only response to a script". Nigel supports this, saying,

> You can't hear a smile . . . because you can't hear it there's no need to panic. [The audience] are responding in their own way. I'm not somebody who laughs out loud very often in the theatre. In a play, silence is ok, but in a comedy you would expect to hear a laugh here and there, especially on the things we've laughed at in rehearsal.

Comparing audience response at the previous evening's performance of *Blithe Spirit* with that at the research performance, Penny observes that on the research evening some audience members "had just fantastic laughs and weren't afraid to laugh out loud". The previous evening's audience was smaller and quieter and the actors felt that it had not gone particularly well. However, as Penny says, "Then we walked out, and there were people standing around and saying it was tremendous, even though they hadn't been so vocal." Relating this to everyday life, it indicates that even though response is not overt, the other person can still appreciate what is being communicated.

How vocal audience members are thus varies according to genre, the size of the audience, which I consider later in this chapter, and individual disposition. Most audience member respondents at both research performances said they laughed a great deal. Like Nigel, however, some said that they were not the sort of person who laughs out loud a lot. Among the *Private Lives* respondents, for example, Susan comments, "I didn't laugh that much; inwardly possibly." Bernard, who attended *Blithe Spirit*, says that he didn't laugh aloud a great deal, "it was more a matter of smiling appreciatively at the dialogue". In comedy the actors' technique is very important to response, and in the following section I discuss, for the most part, the actor respondents' views on how this works, relating them to Goffman's (1990) and Putnam's (2000) ideas on everyday interaction.

Making the Text Work

The director of *Private Lives*, Peter, gives his view of the role of the audience in comedy, and how their response can affect the overall performance.

> In comedy the audience tends to be the other, invisible actor on stage. If the audience isn't giving anything back, the actors tend to push a little bit harder, which can sometimes ruin the reality of what they're doing. The audience response tonight made them a lot more relaxed and enabled them just to be real.

This idea of the audience being the "other, invisible actor" in comedy certainly highlights the audience involvement in live performance discussed in Chapters Three and Five. At both *Private Lives* and *Blithe Spirit*, the actors noted that audience response began very early on. At *Private Lives*, Kate says,

> Everyone was keen to laugh at the beginning, which is great. Sometimes it can be a bit unnerving, because you think, 'Well, yes, that is funny, but there's a lot more funny stuff to come', so you wonder how it will progress.

Ged continues this theme observing, "Sometimes you can get audiences that exhaust themselves. They get too worked up and run out of steam". On the other hand, Nigel thinks, "The earlier they start, the bigger they grow". Of course, actors bring all their technique to bear to ensure that the audience "stays with us" (Ged). Similarly in everyday life, it is encouraging to have an early response to communication, yet if this is too enthusiastic and too early it may become overwhelming. These features of interpersonal communication relate to what Putnam highlights as speed of feedback.

Before discussing the data on how the actors use technique to influence their interaction with the audience, it is important to mention that both actors and audience members thought the early response at the performances was perhaps due to people being knowledgeable about theatre, and having a history with Noël Coward and the plays, as outlined in Chapter Five. Kate explains,

> A lot of the laughs we got earlier on were very 'knowing' laughs that come from people who know a lot about theatre. Almost saying, 'Yes, we're in on the joke already because we know how these things work', which was lovely, because they're immediately wanting to have a great time at the theatre. We all noticed that yesterday.

Nigel says the audience at *Blithe Spirit* were "quick to latch on, quick to say, 'Yes, we find that funny'". Ruth, an audience member at *Private Lives*, notes the early response and suggests this might be because the audience is familiar with the story.

> The audience seemed to come in and be part of it right from the beginning. They seemed to be warmed up. Perhaps they knew the story and had seen it many times before.

David extends this a little, remarking on how the audience responded to the delivery of the dialogue.

> It sounded as though there were some 'pros' who knew the script, because they laughed even when very small things came out. They knew the dialogue and were applauding the way it was performed.

Again relating this to everyday life, this contributes to both speed and depth of feedback, which here, we understand, has occurred through shared knowledge.

Considering now technique in communicating the text, credit must be given to the playwright, as indeed many respondents do. The audience member respondents' reaction to the plays themselves is discussed in Chapter Seven on changes in audience perception. Here I look at how the actors view performing Coward, and how the structure of the plays and the dialogue affect audience response. Penny describes audience response at *Blithe Spirit* as follows:

> [Audience response developed] very much the way it should in agreement with the text. The way the piece is written, the structure of it, means it builds and builds and builds. That's precisely what happened with the audience's reaction. The two were working 'in synch', so you know that it's working.

The playwright influences response and, as Goffman (1990) discusses, such textual influence also occurs in everyday life. Kate gives her view of the structure and dialogue of *Private Lives* and suggests what it is like to perform this play.

> The second act is so well constructed that people are laughing in exactly the right way. It's like a tennis match, where one line will be said and they immediately go to the next actor to see if the response is the one they think they're going to have. By the time we got to the third act it was wonderful, because people were right there with what was going on.

This is an excellent example of the immediacy of audience response in the theatre, as discussed in Chapter Five, which also corresponds to speed of feedback.

The actors try to keep the audience 'with them' using a number of techniques, which are designed to present the plays in a way that is conducive to audience response. These techniques are what Goffman (1990) is describing when he employs the metaphor of acting in the theatre to illustrate interaction in everyday life. They are what individuals use to "manage" the "given" communication or talk (14 et seq). The actors in my research describe the techniques as follows, and this detail amplifies Goffman's description of the processes involved in everyday interaction. The actors discuss the pace at which the play is performed; the timing of the dialogue, which is especially important in comedy; the delivery of the lines; and, finally, the less tangible actors' instinct. Where such techniques are successful in interpersonal communication, they assist community formation; where less so, they tend to produce exclusion. Ged thinks that in the first few performances of a production the actor learns a lot "from the technical point of view; working with the audience, and how the pace of the show actually dictates their response to a large extent". He continues,

> One of the things you have to do is get the pace right. If it's too slow it gives [the audience] time to think . . . [and] if it's too fast they're running to catch up, and they can't hear properly and you don't let them in. They miss essential bits of information.

Similarly, Nigel says,

> If [the lines] are too quick, too glancing, too knowing, [the audience] miss those and like other things, like Edith [the maid] tramping along in the background is funnier than a witty line.

Ged describes how he approaches the crucial technique of timing in comedy.

> If a laugh comes you have to wait, because if you walk over the laugh it kills it, but there's a compromise between waiting for the laugh and stopping the action. There are some laughs that you should ride over because there's a bigger one to come, and if you stop and wait for that they run out of steam and you lose that next one. So it's finely judged sometimes.

In general in the performance, the delivery of the lines and the actions must be fresh. As Ged puts this,

> It's the first time you've said it and the first time you've done this particular action . . . There's no room to think between the lines; you have to be absolutely on the line. Being on stage sometimes is like having a ball up in the air, and if you let your breath waver the ball comes down. The moment you stop in between the line and think, and try to get yourself to the next bit, it's gone.

One of the audience members at *Private Lives*, Beryl, who is a very keen theatregoer, shows her appreciation of this aspect of acting when she says she felt that the actors were "doing it for you as if for the first time". In terms of the actor's instinct, Nigel gives the example of feeling that an audience can take the pace perhaps a little quicker. If response is good, he says,

> You allow your instinct to rise just a bit: funny looks, or quirky things, or daring to do a bit more; lean a little further, get a little more hysterical maybe. If they warm to that sort of thing, it's even richer . . . It's like surfing on a wave. When you're on the wave, you don't know how you've got there, but you think, 'Gosh, this feels comfortable; let's see where it goes.' It's tiny percentages of difference probably, if you could quantify it, but the experience is rich; much, much richer. You just can't say how.

Penny, too, thinks that a positive audience response, particularly at the beginning of a run,

> gives you the confidence to 'play' more. Certainly there were a couple of things I did last night, which I hadn't tried before. I felt comfortable enough, because the audience were comfortable and enjoying themselves, to try different ways of doing things, or different moves, or a different way of delivering a line. Consequently I got a couple of different responses.

In these ways, then, the actors try to ensure a good audience response. They are introducing into their performances those aspects of everyday interaction described by both Goffman (1990) and Putnam (2000). They are the messages that Goffman (1990) refers to as "given off" (14 et seq), and Putnam (2000) describes as non-verbal messages: the facial and vocal expressions, gestures, postures and movements that he puts forward as being important in interpersonal collaboration and building trust (175). To conclude this section, I give two quotations that summarize how the interaction between actors and audience can be very successful in terms of communication processes. First, the director of *Private Lives* remarks, "[The actors] clearly loved it that the audience was responding very well, and were lifted by that." Second, giving an actor's view, Penny says, "It's always lovely when people are enjoying what you're doing. It gives you a lift . . . to have that live experience of you saying something and the audience reacting positively." So far in this chapter I have focused on positive audience response. In the next section I discuss some of the respondents' views on how the interaction between audience and actors can be

problematic. I relate this to how interpersonal communication in everyday life can be less than successful and lead to exclusion.

When Interaction Doesn't Work

As discussed in the last section, both Nigel and Penny noted that the interaction with the *Blithe Spirit* audiences differed between the two most recent performances. Kate observed the same about the *Private Lives* audiences. In both cases the audience on the evening before the research performance was quieter, but not necessarily less appreciative. As Penny puts this, "The dynamic of a performance can change really quite dramatically from one night to the next." One of the audience member respondents, Muriel, who has been involved on the administrative side of an amateur dramatic group, says that because of this involvement she is "very conscious of audiences and how they react to different things. Some nights they're dead, and [the actors] just don't get anything back". How conscious audience members are of audience response is something I take up in the next section on the collective interaction among audience members. A 'dead' audience can indicate genuinely poor response, where they may not appreciate what is being communicated. This is really the other side of the coin from the successful interaction described above, and can similarly be transferred to interpersonal communication in everyday life.

While audiences can be "quiet" or "dead", there are other matters that hinder interaction between performers and audiences, and thus tend to produce exclusion. Sally cites an experience where she felt actors' attempts to interact with the audience had overstepped a boundary that was comfortable for her. In this production,

> the actors in the first few minutes go out into the audience. I don't really like audience participation too much, and I was a bit worried because I was at the front and they were coming in my direction. I was really worried about what was going to happen, and thinking, 'Oh, I can't respond to this' . . . I want to go and see [the actors]. I don't want people to see me.

Similarly, Jenny thinks that if you are very close to the performers "sometimes you feel like next thing you're going to be in with them. If you're no good at acting, it feels like a threat rather than a pleasure". As Nigel observes, "[In Studios there is] a very different relationship with the audience." By contrast, Penny has experience of

acting in large-scale commercial productions, where "you know you're going to get a massive response, to the extent that there's no challenge there. You don't have to win people over." These examples show some of the ways in which the interaction between actors and audience can be less than satisfactory. They correspond to interactions in everyday life where one communicator can be overbearing or intrusive, causing the other person to withdraw, or where routinization has reduced any challenge so that lack of effort or apathy prevail. The theatre performance issues raised here are related to where people sit, and the size and shape of the auditorium, and I take these up in the last section of the chapter. Before this, in the next section, I discuss the data on the collective interaction among audience members.

Collectivity

The focus in this section is on the processes through which audience members communicate with each other to generate response and build community. Again I draw parallels between interaction processes at theatre performances and interpersonal communication in everyday life. I examine first audience member respondents' claims about their level of awareness of other audience members. Second, I look at the processes through which they think response becomes collective, and third, I consider the ways in which some respondents felt excluded from collective response. Finally, I discuss respondents' views on the size of the audience and audience response.

Awareness of Others

In Chapter Five I highlighted the fact that many respondents say they are not particularly aware of the social composition of the audience, but nevertheless have actually absorbed quite a lot about it. Similarly, some respondents say they focus on the play and are not aware of audience response. Jack, for example, claims, "I go to watch a play and I don't worry about the audience." This suggests how audience response and, by extension, community can be taken for granted. Pam and Sally also say they are not particularly aware of the audience, but they do note audience response when it is not in line with their expectations. Pam comments generally, "Sometimes you think, 'What's the matter with these people? They're not laughing at anything.'" Referring to audience response at *Blithe Spirit*, Sally observes, "I don't

think [the audience] always responded to some of the lines that maybe needed to be responded to, or you would expect them to respond to."

Most respondents are able to make some comment about audience response at the performance and whether they felt part of it. As we have seen previously, some audience member respondents say they are very aware of the audience. Muriel, for example, is tuned in to audience response through her involvement with an amateur group, and Joan makes a practice of looking round the audience to see whether people look as though they are happy to be there. In addition, one or two respondents at The Octagon make the comment that audience members are much more aware of the other people in the audience at a theatre in the round. Rob comments on his own experience at *Private Lives*.

> At The Octagon, especially where we were sitting [at the front], you can see people very well, because you're not very far from the people facing you. Once or twice I noticed people . . . laughing out loud or giggling. That evening the audience were 'on board' and their attention seemed to be held.

Given that most audience member respondents were aware of collective audience response at the performances, and of their own position as an individual in relation to this, I turn now to these processes of communication at theatre performances.

Contagion

Audience response typically takes place along a continuum from an isolated individual response to one that is shared by every audience member. I discuss here how the research respondents think individual response becomes collective. There is strong support among respondents for Bennett's (1997) view, discussed in Chapter Two, that theatre audience response becomes collective, or homogeneous, through confirming individual decoding and suppressing counter-readings "in favour of the reception generally shared" (153). Alice has described the audience as part of the "one-to-one" relationship between actors and audience, and Ged, a *Private Lives* actor, refers to a theatre audience as "a single animal". From his position as an actor, Nigel finds that theatre audiences "do have, retrospectively, a character". This can, for example, be "warm" and "generous", as Kate describes the *Private Lives* audience. The idea of the unity of a theatre audience indicates the strength of

community experience that can be generated in response to a performance. Nigel further observes that early audience response soon becomes collective.

> You find that the sooner [response] begins, the more cohesive it becomes, so that by the end of the first half, when they come out [for the interval], they seem to be able to communicate between each other and say, 'Yes, we're doing the right thing; we're on home territory here; we like it.'

Penny elaborates on how this communication is established, contributing to our understanding of the processes of community formation. She introduces the idea of emotional contagion.

> The whole thing of sitting next to someone . . . you go to see a comedy, you're sitting next to people, you look around you to see if people are having a ball . . . you get the emotional contagion from the stage to the audience and the emotional contagion from yourself to the people around you in the audience.

Similarly, among the audience member respondents, Julie refers to "a chain reaction. One person finds something funny and laughs and that sets everybody else off", and Kay says she thinks response is "an infectious thing [and] the atmosphere builds". The data here confirm the findings in Atkinson's (1984) and Heritage and Greatbatch's (1986) observational studies that applause at political meetings builds through contagion. They are also in line with Jefferson's (1979) interaction analysis on laughter in everyday life, and how it is elicited through 'invitation'.

Considering now audience response at the research performances, Gwen first makes a general point about theatre audiences saying, "I have the impression that theatre audiences don't show their response hugely, unless it's a pantomime or a real farce." At *Blithe Spirit*, Gwen says,

> I think it was a middle class, middle aged audience and they're not very demonstrative . . . Nobody was bored, I don't think. Everybody was watching, so they were caught up with it, but not frightfully expressive.

This corresponds to the actors' views that an audience can still appreciate the performance even though response is not overt, and I have suggested that this is transferable to situations in everyday life. Beth also sees audience response in terms of people not appearing to be bored, when she says, "Nobody was wriggling or

messing around, you know, like people do when they get bored. It was all right. [The audience] seemed to quite like it." Other respondents note that response at *Private Lives* and at *Blithe Spirit* was not as vocal as at other productions they have seen in those venues. Thus volume of audience response can be a gauge of community experience, but the possibility of quiet appreciation of the performance must be taken into account. Regarding the response at *Private Lives*, Jack observes, "[It was] quite good really, but I've heard louder applause at the end. You can tell at the end of the play how the audience feels about it." About the response at *Blithe Spirit*, Louise comments,

> The laughter wasn't as raucous as at other productions we've seen, but I felt the script for *Blithe Spirit* was very clever. You had to listen very carefully because you could easily miss things. I found I had to concentrate really hard. There was quite a bit of laughter. I think everyone enjoyed it.

These remarks complement the actors' ideas about audience response outlined in the previous section, where they highlight the importance of the audience listening and the "quality of their silence". Kay's view of response at *Blithe Spirit* also suggests the need for the audience to listen attentively to the dialogue, and supports Jack's idea of the importance of the applause at the end of the play. She says, "[The audience] seemed to be enjoying it, yes. Lots of laughter in the right places and plenty of applause at the end." The correspondence between actors' and audience members' views, that response was not necessarily overt, and that listening carefully was important, gives an indication of specific ways in which community was constructed at the research performances.

The data discussed so far in this section reflect the general tenor of theatre audience response and the nature of the texts performed. I indicated at the beginning of the chapter that respondents felt that audience response at these performances was very good. I offer here, therefore, in support of this claim, some of the audience members' views on this audience response, and note their import for community experience. Respondents comment on how the people in their own theatregoing groups enjoyed the performance as well as on audience response as a whole. The views of response among theatregoing companions support my suggestion that these smaller groups form communities within the larger audience and theatregoing

communities. For example, Jim says, “Everyone in our group thoroughly enjoyed it”, and Jill observes, “Everyone seemed to enjoy it . . . In my group we all enjoyed it.” About audience response as a whole, Alice remarks that the *Private Lives* audience responded “with enthusiasm”, Jean that they were “very responsive”, and Charles thinks, “[The audience responded] very well. Everyone seemed to appreciate it.” At *Blithe Spirit*, Muriel found the audience “very receptive”, and Bernard feels they responded “very well. They seemed to enjoy it and responded to the play extremely well.” Joan observes, “The majority of people seemed to be thoroughly enjoying it”, and Jenny comments, “I think [the audience] all felt quite involved.” For both performances, most respondents say they felt part of the audience as a whole. As Vic puts it, “When I laughed, I could feel the audience laughing as well. It wasn’t a case of I was laughing and they weren’t.” I have already noted that Pam, Sally and Muriel find that sometimes audiences do not respond as they would expect them to, and this is a case of individuals feeling more in tune with the performance than do their fellow audience members. A more serious case of exclusion is where individuals do not feel part of collective audience response. In the next section, I examine the examples of this that arise in the data.

Exclusion

To introduce this section I quote the *Private Lives* director’s explanation of why audience response is different at every performance. His view suggests how individuals can feel excluded at particular performances.

> [Audience response] does differ from night to night, and if you came tomorrow night you’d see a completely different show. Audience response depends on their individual interests, sense of humour and sensibilities. Put them all together in a big group and you’ll find very different responses.

One respondent whose sensibilities led her to feel excluded from some of the audience response at *Private Lives* is Helen. She says,

> There were times when most of the audience were laughing and I wasn’t. I was looking for things underneath. It did look as if it was going to be quite nasty in one part, not knowing the story.

Her exclusion here is based on the subject matter of the play and unfamiliarity with the story. She did not share knowledge of the play with other audience members, and

felt excluded from the interpretive communities for Noël Coward and for *Private Lives*. A number of respondents at *Blithe Spirit* discuss more practical reasons for their feelings of exclusion from collective audience response. These respondents were sitting in the Circle, and there are two reasons for their sense of exclusion. The first is that there were only a few people in the Circle for that performance. Gwen suggests, "If the Circle had been packed out, I might have felt part of the audience a bit more perhaps." The other reason for feeling excluded is that the Circle is quite some distance vertically from the Stalls. Annette and Bernard are a couple who were also sitting there for the performance. Annette thinks, "You're better down in the body of the theatre to get a feeling of the audience", and Bernard comments, "You are more a part of the audience in the Stalls . . . the Circle is a little bit more remote." These last examples are related to the influence of the size of the audience on audience response, a matter I take up in the next section here, and the nature of the auditorium, which is the subject of the final section of the chapter.

A Full House

I discuss here respondents' views on how the size of the audience influences response and community experience, relating the data to Bennett's (1997) and theatre practitioners' ideas. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Bennett's view is that capacity audiences lead to good collective response because they give spectators the confidence to respond and reaffirm their individual and group identity (131). My own exploratory research (Hayes 2002) confirmed this tendency. In Chapter Three I noted how both Macintosh (1993) and Eyre (Eyre and Wright 2000) find that audience density is important in encouraging audience response. Audience density, they suggest, is related not so much to seating capacity and size of 'house', but to the shape of the auditorium and the presence of a "critical mass of people" (Eyre and Wright 2000:321). The idea of audience density will be recognizable to theatregoers who find that the box office has booked audience members together in a large group, perhaps in the stalls and also the dress circle, and to people who find they are invited to move from where they are sitting to join a larger group of audience members, sometimes in another area of the theatre altogether.

Respondents in this research support the idea that a full house encourages audience response, and first here I examine their reasons for this view. I then discuss their experiences of different sizes of audience, which again shed light on why fuller houses are more conducive to audience response and community experience. To begin this section, I quote again the director of *Private Lives*. Having acknowledged that the seventy-eight per cent capacity audience at the research performance affected audience response "greatly", he discusses how different sizes of audience can respond, then reiterates the effect individual differences can have on response.

> If [the audience at the research performance] had been a 'thin' audience, you would probably have found that they were not as ready to be responsive. However, there have been small, responsive audiences. It's not a rule of thumb that a small audience will be a bad audience. They will do different things. We had a big audience on Saturday night and they were very quiet. It's not so much the size as its make up.

It is important to bear these possibilities in mind during the following discussion of the influence of a full house. The Octagon respondents consider the size of the audience at *Private Lives* to all intents and purposes to be a full house. Capacity at Theatre by the Lake for *Blithe Spirit* was sixty-five per cent, and respondents again feel this was full enough not to affect response adversely. Louise, for example, remarks, "I noticed there were some empty seats, but I didn't feel it spoiled anybody's enjoyment." Similarly, Bernard comments, "I don't think that really affected things. Perhaps slightly, but I think [the audience] were still appreciative and responsive. I don't think it made a great deal of difference." Some respondents thought the house was fuller than the actual figure. Derek, for example, says, "I don't think it mattered to be honest. I did look round. I didn't realise it was only two thirds full. I thought it was more than that." Jenny comments, "I thought it was fuller than that . . . It didn't feel echoing or empty", suggesting how an auditorium can seem when there is a much smaller audience. Thus, even though neither audience was actually at capacity, audience members at both performances perceived that the house was full enough for collective response to occur, and for them to enjoy the experience. In Macintosh's terms, audience density was sufficient, and in Eyre's phrase, there was "a critical mass . . . [allowing] . . . a 'state of theatre' to exist" (Eyre and Wright 2000:321).

In support of Bennett's view, most respondents feel that a full house generates better response. For example, Jill comments, "It's always better if it's full", and Joan remarks, "A full house is always better." The respondents suggest reasons for this other than the audience based confidence to respond and reaffirmation of individual and group identity that Bennett cites. The reasons they volunteer show an awareness of the actor's response to the audience, and how this affects the interaction between actors and audience. Several respondents say they think a full house is better for the actors. Alice considers the size of the audience to be "very important for the actors", and Ruth thinks, "When there aren't many in, it must be harder for the actors." Rob points out, "There were sufficient numbers for the actors to 'feed off' the response. It's a two-way process." Beryl and Kate consider size of audience to be important for both actors and audience. Beryl says it has "a tremendous bearing on [response]. A full theatre must make a difference, both to the audience and the players, without a doubt." As an actor, Kate finds, "A full house is wonderful for us. It buoys things up, and I think for an audience as well." The actors receive response, "a laugh or a sigh, in larger numbers", and the audience, in accord with Bennett here, "feel more comfortable. They feel this is how it should be, and don't worry about the fact that there are only a few of them there".

Respondents' experiences of smaller houses explain why response is often not as good as it is in larger houses. Comparing the smaller house at *Blithe Spirit* on the preceding evening with the larger house at the research performance, Nigel comments,

> We found that [the smaller audience] felt a bit isolated . . . We thought that maybe because they were slightly intimidated, because there weren't more of them, they were a bit slower to have the confidence to respond vocally.

Referring again to her ideas about emotional contagion, Penny suggests, "If you get an audience where there are empty rows in front of them, or nobody sitting next to them, the contagiousness will be less." The audience member respondents' experiences of smaller houses, endorse the actors' views. Pam thinks, "If there are empty seats around about, you're not so inclined to be swept along with the audience feeling." Referring to her experience of smaller audiences at The Octagon, Helen

says, “I’ve been to some plays there where it’s been half empty, and it is better when it’s full.” Similarly, Charles relates,

> I have been to productions where there has been very poor attendance, and it’s very difficult to enjoy them. Certainly from the audience point of view it takes a lot away when you can see empty seats in the background, as you can especially in the round.

Charles’s mention of the shape of the auditorium indicates the importance of this factor to audience density and response, as noted by Macintosh and Eyre, and discussed in the following section.

Where there is a large audience in a large auditorium, Rob finds that “sometimes . . . you get a sort of ‘mob’ attitude”. This is similar to Penny’s experience of performing in a large-scale production, where, she says,

> That sort of crowd mentality becomes like being in a crowd at a rock concert . . . [people enjoy] being within the crowd. Really, if you compare it with a smaller medium like this, it’s the same thing just magnified. People are enjoying being in that atmosphere.

The idea of a ‘mob’ has negative overtones, suggesting a stage beyond community experience where the individual may feel threatened. Yet feeling part of a larger audience like a crowd at a rock concert indicates, as Penny suggests, a magnification of the community experience that can occur in the theatre. Thus, the size of the auditorium, as well as the size of the audience within it, is an important factor in influencing audience response and community experience. Jean puts this matter succinctly.

> The Octagon is a small theatre and consequently it was full, whereas if you’d been in a bigger theatre it might not have been full. If you are in a theatre which is only half full, response is not as easy as in a small theatre that is absolutely full.

So far in this chapter I have considered the interactions that take place at theatre performances between audience and actors and among audience members. I have examined the nature of such interpersonal communication and related it to community experience in both the theatre and everyday life. The next main section in this chapter looks at respondents’ views on the different characteristics of auditoria and their influence on audience response.

Theatre Spaces

In this section of the chapter, I am concerned with the characteristics of auditoria that influence audience response; whether they are conducive to it, encouraging communication and engendering community, or whether the reverse is the case. As well as developing Atkinson's (1984) and Heritage and Greatbatch's (1986) work on political meetings, I relate the data to theatre practitioners' views, since one of their major concerns is that auditoria should encourage good audience response, whether this is manifest or latent. I first discuss some ideas respondents have on how important the auditorium is for their theatregoing experience. Second, I consider their views on the size of auditoria, and third, on their shape, including here, in addition to basic configuration, the influence of the actors' eyeline on audience response, and how it can affect where respondents prefer to sit. I draw on their experience of other auditoria as well as those at The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake.

The Space

As discussed in Chapter Three, Harris (1999) argues that a focus on text and performer can deflect from the impact on the theatre audience of venue and staging (75). Yet, similarly to the way in which some respondents claim not to be especially aware of the social composition of the audience or its response, several respondents say they are not much aware of the auditorium when they go to the theatre. Interestingly, these respondents are all from the Theatre by the Lake sample. I suggest that this is because the Theatre by the Lake end-stage auditorium is conventional, which makes respondents less aware of differences in auditorium configuration than their Octagon counterparts. As will be seen in the later section on the shape of the auditorium, The Octagon respondents are much more ready to discuss the influence of the in the round auditorium there, and this perhaps indicates that they are aware that it is less conventional and offers different experiences. Returning to the Theatre by the Lake respondents' ideas, Julie, for example, says, "[Involvement] doesn't depend on the auditorium; it depends on what's on stage. As Derek explains,

> I don't think you're aware of [the auditorium] once the play starts . . . once the action starts you're totally unaware of the surroundings. You're involved in the play, if it holds you.

However, rather like noticing audience response when it is not in accordance with their expectations, respondents become aware of the auditorium when they perceive negative aspects to it, or when it seems inappropriate for the production. Barbara mentions some features of auditoria relating to audience comfort that can hinder the theatregoing experience. She says, "I don't think the auditorium matters a great deal . . . unless the seating is . . . uncomfortable, or you can't see. I don't think it really matters; it's what's on." Pam finds, "Once you get into a play, you forget the surroundings anyway." Referring to the production of *Blithe Spirit* at Theatre by the Lake, she says, "[The auditorium] didn't seem inappropriate; it didn't jar." Other respondents have found some theatre auditoria completely inappropriate because they discourage audience response. An auditorium that Jenny mentions is "a sixties building; lots of glass and concrete . . . I don't think you get very good response in there". Sally refers to an auditorium she found "totally inappropriate".

> [It] is just a huge open space, that has lots of temporary seating put in, and it's just like going into a blank void. It's really awful. You feel like you're sitting in a warehouse. There's no atmosphere and no sense of occasion . . . I wouldn't go back there to anything.

The examples in the data denying the influence of the auditorium reflect a taken for granted approach to the issue. As the discussion has progressed, it has become evident that Harris's observation on the importance of physical context is a matter that has indeed affected some respondents.

Thus, there is general agreement among Theatre by the Lake respondents that the auditorium must be appropriate for the production. Bernard has experienced performances in both the end-stage and in the round configurations there. He says, "I'm more used to [the end-stage configuration] because it's more conventional, I suppose, and therefore one has been to theatres more often where that's the form. Either can be equally appropriate." Louise has been to small Studio performances and huge productions in very big theatres. She finds, "For most productions I've seen, the auditorium seemed appropriate . . . I do think about it and I think it does

affect your enjoyment of the performance." Pam discusses her experiences of end-stage and in the round productions as follows:

> I don't know that I have a particular preference. I think some things are more suited to settings in the round. I like both, the traditional proscenium theatre as well as theatre in the round, but there are definite things that are suited to one and not the other. Occasionally it seems to me they get them wrong . . . It doesn't have to be the modern, contemporary stuff that is done in the round. I've seen Shakespeare done very well in the round.

Finally here, Sally pinpoints how an auditorium can enhance a production, saying, "It's really interesting just to see how people use different spaces. I find that it often adds something to the production." I suggest that this enhancement is through stimulating audience response and generating community experience. In the next section I look at respondents' views on how the size of the auditorium affects audience response, and relate them to theatre practitioners' ideas.

Sizes

In discussing the influence of the size of the auditorium on audience response and community experience, I relate the data especially to Macintosh's (1993) view that "smaller theatre spaces . . . have always proved more successful for creative theatre than larger auditoria" (171), and Alexander's (1995) comment that a very small space can increase the self-consciousness of the audience. In agreement with Macintosh, respondents do prefer smaller auditoria, and the four hundred seater Octagon and Theatre by the Lake are very much to their taste in terms of size. There is considerable experience of other sizes of auditorium among the respondents. I discuss first their ideas on large auditoria, followed by their experiences in Studio spaces. Finally, I consider their views on why they prefer smaller auditoria such as those at The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake.

There is a general view among the respondents that large auditoria are appropriate for large-scale productions like musicals, a genre that several of them enjoy. One of these, Jim, describes why he sometimes likes to watch performances from a distance.

> With a lot of the stuff on television, theatre and the cinema, if you're a little bit away from it you can actually see it better. Sometimes you've

> got to stand back to appreciate the full picture. I think it's better to look at a performance head on . . . and see the whole thing.

The actors discuss how acting technique is different in large auditoria. Ged explains, "The whole thing is on a larger scale . . . there's [a] delay between the stage and the back row, so you can afford to be slower . . . [and] you've got to be broader." Similarly, Penny says,

> It feels like a completely different experience . . . In massive spaces there's a long distance thing that goes on, so you don't get the immediacy of the audience's response . . . You're doing a massive performance in terms of the acting style.

Immediacy of response, or speed of feedback, is one of the features of interpersonal communication noted in the section on the interaction between audience and actors as making an important contribution to community experience. I have also discussed it in depth in Chapter Five in relation to differences between live and mediatized performance and audience experience. It can be suggested, therefore, that community experience is more easily attainable in smaller theatre spaces. While Charles says he likes large auditoria for "good quality productions", he recognizes that there can be problems "hearing and seeing" in them. In general, respondents do not like to be too high up or too far away from the stage, as they often are in a large auditorium. Jean says she dislikes being up in the 'gods', "because then you're very much removed from the action". In a large auditorium, Jill observes, you can be "so far away that you don't feel as involved as you do [in a smaller auditorium] . . . the actors look like little ants on the stage". Although Charles notes that it can be difficult to hear in a large auditorium, he experienced a musical production where the sound was "so amplified that it was horrific". Muriel, too, on a visit to a large-scale musical, found, "There seemed to be such a lot of people and noise . . . and I just didn't enjoy being there." Difficulties of hearing and seeing, and being too far away from the performance to feel involved in it, thus run counter to the formation of community in large auditoria. In addition, excessive sound amplification, noise, and crowds of people make some respondents uncomfortable, and community experience for them in these circumstances is unlikely. These features of interpersonal communication in larger auditoria that tend to produce exclusion are transferable to situations in everyday life, such as lectures, talks or meetings.

Considering now much smaller Studio spaces, respondents' experiences reflect their disadvantages and advantages in terms of audience response that theatre practitioners have indicated. Shedding some light on Alexander's feeling that very small spaces can increase the self-consciousness of the audience, in the section on problematic interaction between audience and actors I mentioned that audience member respondents sometimes feel they can be too close to the actors. Also, from an actor's point of view, Nigel feels there is a very different relationship with the audience in such small spaces. Explaining this, he says,

> [You can be] three feet away [from the audience], and you're aware that they're slightly drawing back from you because you're an actor. They feel that informality and the lack of feeling that you're safely on the stage.

Audience member respondents' views corroborate this. Referring to a Studio production he had seen, Vic remarks, "You were sitting very near and I didn't enjoy that very much. There were just benches . . . and I thought it was a bit cramped." Louise's experience suggests it can be a production inappropriate for a Studio space that gives rise to problematic audience response. She comments on small Studio spaces and her experience as follows:

> The only thing I'd say about the small areas is you do feel claustrophobic on occasions. I've seen a production of *Macbeth* in a very tiny Studio, where there was only seating for forty people. There were only four actors in that, and you actually felt you were on the stage with them. For some productions I think that's nice, but for that I felt I needed to be distanced. It was such a strong production that I needed to be away from it.

On the other hand, experiences in Studios can be rewarding for both actors and audience. Penny gives an actor's view of the Theatre by the Lake Studio, which seats eighty people, saying, "I've played the Studio here, which is probably the smallest space I've ever played. I absolutely loved it because you're so aware of the response." As noted in Chapter Five, Joan and Sally often attend performances at the Studio together. Both of them find their experiences there rewarding in terms of their involvement in the performance. Joan comments, "I love the Studio . . . You really feel as though you're part of it; particularly so in the Studio, more so than in the main house"; and Sally says, "Some of the productions in the Studio are very intimate and they involve you a great deal."

Turning now to why respondents prefer smaller main house auditoria like The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake, I take as a starting point Jean's observation, presented earlier, that response is "[easier] in a small theatre that is absolutely full". Vic confirms this when he says, "A theatre like [Theatre by the Lake] is great because it would have to be a very bad day for it to be poorly attended." There is simply a better chance of experiencing a full house in a smaller auditorium. Two other main themes emerge from the data. The first is that smaller auditoria are "intimate", and actors and audience are "close" to each other. The second, which is related to the first, is that audiences feel "part of" or "involved in" the performance.

Looking first at intimacy and closeness, and from the actors' point of view at The Octagon, Kate comments, "You are never more than nine rows away from the stage, which makes it very intimate." As an audience member at *Private Lives*, Susan observes, "You could actually see the actors and their expressions, because it's such a small, intimate theatre." The actors at Theatre by the Lake comment on the intimacy of the auditorium and the closeness of the audience there. Nigel says,

> I like [the auditorium] very much. I like it partly because it's relatively small and you feel you can be quite intimate. The way it's designed means that you feel you're really very close, even to the Circle . . . You don't feel you have to really push your voice too hard.

Penny describes how she feels about the Theatre by the Lake auditorium as follows:

> It's a tremendous auditorium to play in, because you get the combined feeling that you're playing an intimate space . . . but it also holds a decent amount of people . . . You don't have to be too 'big'; you can be incredibly subtle, and you still reach the audience. It's a wonderful space.

Jenny exemplifies the audience member viewpoint, saying, "It's quite an intimate theatre . . . It's still not too large, so that you don't feel isolated."

Audience member respondents at both theatres comment on how they feel part of performances and involved in them. Liz remarks, "You feel more involved [at The Octagon] than you do in a big theatre", and Jill says, "You're . . . close to it . . . [so] you feel more part of it." About the Theatre by the Lake auditorium, Bernard says,

> I prefer smaller theatres rather than large theatres . . . This is one of the reasons why we like Keswick, because of the intimate atmosphere. Wherever you sit you feel part of the action.

Even though he likes older, traditional theatres, Derek thinks newer, smaller ones like Theatre by the Lake are "by and large . . . more intimate, and in some cases it's better, because you're nearer the stage and more involved than if you're right at the back of the big old theatres". In this discussion, I have identified features of interpersonal communication in smaller auditoria that encourage community experience. Notably these include intimacy, involvement and "feeling part of" the event. Like the features of interpersonal communication in larger auditoria that can produce exclusion, these can be transferred to situations in everyday life. The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake are similar in size, but they are different in configuration, and in the next section I discuss respondents' views about the shape of these and other theatre auditoria, and relate these to theatre practitioners' ideas.

Shapes

Here I relate the data to theatre practitioners' ideas about the shape of auditoria in both the horizontal and vertical planes, where Macintosh's (1993) and Brook's (1977) work has been especially helpful to this research. First in this section I discuss respondents' comments on theatre spaces other than the small theatre in the round or end-stage auditoria represented by The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake. Second, because the main point of contrast between The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake is their configuration, I consider respondents' ideas about these auditoria separately, also giving their views on alternative configurations. Thus, for The Octagon respondents, I discuss their ideas about The Octagon as a theatre in the round, followed by their views on end-stage configurations; and for Theatre by the Lake respondents, I look at their ideas about Theatre by the Lake as an end-stage configuration, followed by their views on theatre in the round. In the third part of this section, I consider the data on the actors' eyeline, since this is a fundamental feature relating to the vertical plane of auditoria and audience response. This feature can affect where respondents choose to sit in an auditorium, and I integrate this into the discussion.

First, then, I discuss respondents' ideas on other kinds of auditoria. Several respondents are fond of the older, traditional theatres with horseshoe auditoria, typical of the Victorian era. Theatre practitioners generally consider these to be very conducive to audience response, because their tiers and galleries mean that audience members can see each other. Derek is one of the respondents who like these theatres and he mentions "the colour and the décor . . . the gilding and the plastering". Jean too, remarks that such theatres "are very ornate, but they're very beautiful". Some respondents are eclectic in their choice of theatre spaces. Richard, for example, says he finds the Swan Theatre in Stratford upon Avon, which has a 'courtyard' configuration, "enormously stimulating", but he is "quite happy with a completely traditional style as well". Gwen describes how she likes to try different spaces.

> I quite like going to different ones though. Small ones or even some outdoor ones. There's one in Cornwall, like a bowl in the hill. Open air ones are very difficult usually, but this one works well. Interesting Studio spaces. I find them fun.

By saying a theatre space "works well", I suggest Gwen is referring to how it encourages the interaction between actors and audience and the development of community experience. A number of other respondents mention open air theatre. Joan takes up the "difficult" aspect, remarking, "You don't really know what the weather's going to do. Also it's very difficult for the actors to project their voices." On the other hand, Sally finds open air productions interesting. She has been to

> two or three Shakespearean productions at . . . a ruined castle; so they use the ruins as a backdrop and then they build the stage setting in front of it. But they also use the architecture; go round the back and in and out. They come at you from different parts of it, and they also came through the audience at one point. It was really good.

Thus open air productions can produce exclusion where it is difficult to hear the actors, or where the weather is inhospitable. However, community experience is encouraged where the character of the environment enhances the production (Brook, in Wallace 1995). Interestingly, Beth and Vic, two of the tourist respondents at Theatre by the Lake, had been to an open air production of *Blithe Spirit* in their home town. One of the reasons they came to see the same play at Theatre by the Lake was to compare the two productions in their different settings. Beth says that for the open air production "the Hall was the backdrop and you had the whole place . . . I wanted

to see how they would manage it in a confined space . . . I thought [the Theatre by the Lake production] worked quite well". Again the expression "worked quite well" implies a successful production in terms of interaction and community experience.

Focusing now on The Octagon respondents' ideas on the main auditorium there, I begin with the *Private Lives* director's view of the theatre space in which he has also created many other productions.

> I like it because it's unique in that it's not like a traditional theatre space. *It's a space where actors and audience can really interact*. There is no imaginary fourth wall. It allows a more direct narrative to be told and it just feels like a magical space. [emphasis added]

Kate describes how she feels about The Octagon auditorium from an actor's viewpoint.

> I love it. It's one of my favourite spaces. Thrust with the audience on three sides . . . In the second act [of *Private Lives*] you really are in there going through it all with them. Proscenium arch works really well, but it can be a sort of barrier, that fourth wall thing, and you don't have that here.

As suggested in the section on the importance of the auditorium, The Octagon audience member respondents were forthcoming in their appreciation of the in the round configuration there. Together with the above director's and actor's views, this supports the theatre practitioners' ideas, mentioned previously and discussed in Chapter Three, that where spectators are aware of each other and the collective nature of the event, this is conducive to audience response (Hewison 1995). Ruth comments, "The effect of theatre in the round is that it brings it up close to you and you become part of it." About *Private Lives*, Helen says, "You felt you were in the room with them." Enid is enthusiastic about theatre in the round. She thinks *Private Lives* "needed to be in thrust", which strongly supports the view that this production had gained from its staging; that it improved upon earlier productions in proscenium arch theatres. She continues, "In the round brings out so many different things. You've got people coming in from different directions, and people always there and no curtain coming down. It's more natural." One or two respondents do mention features they think are disadvantageous to their enjoyment of productions in theatres in the round. Alice, the oldest respondent, prefers "not to see the [audience members]

opposite in the background, but it doesn't bother me, I accept it". Jack remarks that in theatre in the round "scene changes are very difficult, so you tend to find the same set throughout the whole play". This is a matter that Charles takes up, and I begin The Octagon respondents' discussion of theatre in the round and proscenium arch theatre with his comparison.

Charles comments, "I've now become quite used to The Octagon and the Royal Exchange. Originally I did feel the lack of scenery and the convention of the proscenium arch, [but] I'm quite happy with both now." Suggesting how audience members become accustomed to theatre in the round, Helen says, "Occasionally I go to old-fashioned proscenium arch theatres, and it does seem odd now." Ruth describes her preference for theatre in the round over proscenium arch theatre, saying, "You don't feel separated. There isn't a big gap between the stage and you. You become absorbed in the production. I do. Once it starts, I feel part of it; it draws me in." Lastly here, Enid, who attends mostly The Octagon and the Royal Exchange, says, "I don't think we'd ever enjoy again theatre that's 'just a stage.'" It is clear that The Octagon respondents think very highly of the auditorium there, and that they have not only become accustomed to theatre in the round, but for most of them it has become a distinct preference. The Octagon is conducive to audience response and community formation because it *is* in the round, lacking the "barrier" of the fourth wall. Audience member respondents are aware of the communal nature of the event, and emphasize feeling "part of" the productions.

Considering now Theatre by the Lake respondents' comments on the end-stage configuration there, as I noted in the section on the importance of the auditorium, they had rather less to say about it than their Octagon counterparts. This, I suggested, is because the auditorium at Theatre by the Lake is more conventional. However, the actors in *Blithe Spirit* make a number of observations about the auditorium from a performance point of view. Nigel says, "To perform in, visually, it's very comfortable and nice. It's not glaring, it's not too black and you can see . . . [also] there aren't many audibility problems." Penny, too, thinks the acoustics are "tremendous. The design of the auditorium means that you can be heard even underneath the Circle, in the Stalls seats at the back". Nigel has reservations about

the Side Stalls, which he feels are too straight. He says, "You do feel that there's not a friendly curve to the Side Stalls. You feel that the sightlines for the people sitting closest to the stage are so flat that you worry." Both actors have sat in various areas in the auditorium during rehearsals, or for other productions. Nigel says that most of the cast and crew have done this and "think it's a comfortable place to sit". Penny remarks, "I've sat and watched many productions that I haven't been involved in, and I think it's a wonderful space." The acoustics and comfort of the auditorium are features that are, of course, important for audiences' enjoyment of the performance. Theatre by the Lake does have the tiers and galleries that Mackintosh (1993) especially indicates are important for audience awareness of each other and response. However, these are not entirely successful at this venue, partly because, as Nigel suggests, the Side Stalls are rather straight, but also, as we have seen earlier, the Circle is both small and rather distant vertically from the Stalls. About Theatre by the Lake's auditorium generally and from the audience member respondents' viewpoint, Vic makes the comment that, for a small theatre, "the stage is quite big", and notes that the Christmas productions especially have large casts. This reflects how productions at Theatre by the Lake do make extensive use of the large apron in front of the proscenium arch, which reduces its fourth wall effect. Finally here, I quote Muriel's experience in another proscenium arch theatre. This contrasts with Enid's observation that there is "no curtain coming down" at theatre in the round, and provides an illustration of an experience that would not be possible there. Muriel describes this as follows:

> I do like a curtain . . . One experience I had was when we went to the ballet . . . It was *Romeo and Juliet* to Prokofiev's music. The second act started with the Dance of the Night, and when the curtain went back they were all in black and gold. There was this tremendous music and you could hear everybody gasp. It was fantastic. It was wonderful.

This highlights the need to be aware that unique combinations of the characteristics of individual venues, productions, and performances can produce heightened experiences at any time, regardless of the general conduciveness of the features of auditoria considered here.

With reference to Theatre by the Lake when it is converted to an in the round configuration, Nigel has further reservations. As an actor, he finds it "strange" to perform from the new stage position in the Front Stalls, "through what was the proscenium arch", to the people sitting on the stage. While this may affect his interaction with the audience, his fears prove unfounded from the viewpoint of audience member respondents who have attended productions in this configuration. Bernard attended *Neville's Island*, and says, "We were at the front of the Rear Stalls and were very near the stage as a result of that. That was fine . . . It worked fine for that particular production." Similarly, Sally describes her experience at the same production.

> I thought it was fantastic. I was sitting quite close to the set and you felt really involved. When I walked in I didn't know how they were going to pull it off, but I thought it worked really well. I thought it was very cleverly worked out. I enjoyed that a lot.

Jenny had been to *Neville's Island* and *Twelfth Night*, which was also in the round. She thought they were both good, and says she likes this configuration "as a change. They do it very well". Thus Theatre by the Lake audience member respondents have less to say about their experiences of the auditorium in its end-stage configuration than when it is in the round. As suggested, this may be because more unconventional theatre spaces provoke greater discussion, but it is also a reflection of how much respondents have appreciated their experience of Theatre by the Lake productions in the round. This confirms the view indicated by the data from The Octagon respondents that theatre in the round is especially conducive to audience response and the formation of community.

The actors' eyeline in auditoria is not a feature that could be approached directly in the interviews, except in technical terms with the actors, but the data that emerge on the relative positions of actors and audience members are revealing. The actors in *Private Lives* at The Octagon, where the stage is on the same level as the first row of the audience, as Brook (in Wallace 1995) suggests it should be, say they have to "play up" a lot. In this case a little more than half the audience is above the eyeline of the actors, but Macintosh's (1993) suggestion that half the house should be above and half below the actors' eyeline is largely adhered to. The actors contrast

this with being above the heads of some of the audience in proscenium arch theatres. Ged comments,

> You've got to play up a lot [at The Octagon]. You think because everybody's on a level with you and close, it's ok, but actually for the people higher up . . . you really have to hold your head up . . . [whereas] in some proscenium arch theatres the Circle is almost on a level with the stage.

Kate agrees and describes how she thinks the actors' eyeline at The Octagon is advantageous to the interaction between actor and audience.

> It's nicer for me to be right in there with them, rather than on some proscenium arch stages that are far above everybody's head, and you feel rather elevated. I don't mind looking out and seeing somebody looking straight back at me; that's fine with me and I quite like that. It's much more interesting, because if you watch somebody on stage thinking within character they have to look up at the audience . . . You are therefore opening up everything you do to the audience, which is nicer for them and means they see more, and you have more opportunity to get across what you're trying to do.

Among the audience member respondents at The Octagon, Jack summarizes the issue succinctly, saying, "The stage is down below, so you feel part of it. In other theatres you look up at the stage and it's far away from you." Respondents are generally happy with any seating position at The Octagon, agreeing with Jill's comment, "You can always see, no matter where you are". Those respondents who have sat in the front row have enjoyed the experience. They have not felt too close, and as Alice says, "You lose yourself in the play." This corresponds to Theatre by the Lake respondents' experiences of being on the front row for productions in the round there. Bernard, Jenny and Sally have all enjoyed sitting there, and even if at first they felt "slightly exposed", as Sally puts it, they agree with her when she says, "I was so interested in the play I didn't find any problem." When productions at Theatre by the Lake are set in the round, then, like The Octagon, the stage is at the same level as the first row of the audience.

From the actor's viewpoint at Theatre by the Lake in the proscenium arch configuration, Penny observes, "You don't have to play too high so that the people in the front rows don't see you properly". As it is a new theatre, the design of the auditorium takes into account the problem that the Front Stalls can be well below the

actors' eyeline. Even so, for Jenny and her female theatregoing companions, "The Front Stalls are too far below the stage for us, so we sit in the Rear Stalls in Row G if we can. We always try for that when we book." Indeed, at Theatre by the Lake Row G is hugely popular. It is the front row of the Rear Stalls, giving a clear view to the stage and approximately on a level with it. As Kay observes,

> [It is] an excellent viewing position. We were in the centre; loads of legroom there, because of the break between the Front and Rear Stalls. You just walk straight in to it from the side door. It was wonderful; a clear view.

This, too, is the preferred location for Beth and Vic. Pam, and the group of four female theatregoing companions, also like to sit in the area at the front of the Rear Stalls. I have already mentioned the Circle as presenting difficulties for audience members feeling part of the audience as a whole, and Jenny adds to this, saying, "We didn't like the Circle. It's very cramped at the front and precipitous." Despite Nigel's concern that the sightlines from the Side Stalls are very flat, Derek mentions a production he had very much enjoyed from that position, where he felt, "You were almost part of the action." In that case, at least, the sightlines had not proved problematic for the audience. In sum, with regard to the shape of the auditorium and involvement in the performance, audience member respondents are happy sitting anywhere at The Octagon. At Theatre by the Lake, as for many other theatres, when audience members are familiar with the auditorium they have distinct preferences for where they like to sit. The actors' eyeline is an important feature of the differences between the auditoria, and influences preferences at Theatre by the Lake when it is in the end-stage configuration. Productions in the round there are very involving for audiences, and this is related to the position of the stage being at the same level as the first row of the audience, as it is at The Octagon. In the conclusion to this chapter I draw out the main themes emerging from the discussion of the data on the co-present interaction at theatre performances and the influence of auditoria, and relate them to community experience.

Conclusion

Here I focus attention on the features of co-present interaction at theatre performances that the data suggest encourage a sense of community and those that do not. I relate the data to previous research into applause at political meetings (Atkinson 1984, Heritage and Greatbatch 1986), and laughter in everyday interaction (Jefferson 1979). Developing Goffman's (1990) work on interaction and Putnam's (2000) ideas on interpersonal communication, I forge a link between communication processes and community experience in the theatre and these same features in everyday life. In a recent conference paper (Hayes forthcoming), I suggest that the understanding of community gained through the identification of these features of interpersonal communication can be a useful approach to the resolution of conflict. Further in this conclusion I indicate the characteristics of theatre auditoria that contribute to audience response and community formation or tend to produce exclusion, and again connect with communication processes and community experience in everyday life. Throughout, I relate the data to Bennett's (1997) and theatre practitioners' ideas on audiences, their response, and the nature and influence of auditoria.

In the data on co-present interaction discussed above, respondents describe audience response as "infectious", "a chain reaction", or "emotional contagion". These descriptions are in agreement with previous research by Atkinson (1984), Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) and Jefferson (1979), who also find that contagion plays a large part in building response. Feeling part of, or in tune with, collective response encourages a sense of community among audience members, and this finding supports Bennett's (1997) view that homogeneity of response confirms individual and group identity. Audience response contributes to the interaction between audience and actors, and respondents describe this as "a conversation", "a one-to-one relationship", and "a dynamic". This dynamic can generate community experience. To their side of the dynamic the audience brings early response, often when they are familiar with the play, and, in comedy especially, audible response. It is also important to the dynamic that the audience listens carefully, particularly where the humour is verbal, as it is in Noël Coward's plays. To their side of the dynamic the actors bring the construction of the play and the dialogue, and their acting technique, which includes pace, timing, delivery of the lines and instinct. The size of

the audience influences the dynamic: a house that is full enough to give the experience of a full house “buoys things up” for the actors and makes the audience feel “more comfortable”.

I describe now those features of interaction at theatre performances that the data indicate can produce exclusion. It is important to state at the outset that, since every theatre performance is different in the combination of characteristics that constitute it, a lack of community experience is not always the outcome when such features are present. In terms of the interaction among audience members, a feeling of exclusion from collective response works against a sense of community. In the data, some respondents felt excluded because they were unfamiliar with the play, whereas other audience members knew it well. Other respondents said they did not feel part of the audience as a whole because they were physically separated from the main body of the audience. Looking at the dynamic between audience and actors, there are a number of features here that produce exclusion. These are in direct contrast to those features that do assist community experience, and include slow audience response, less vocal audience response, and the audience not listening carefully or concentrating. Where the size of the audience is small in relation to the auditorium, respondents suggest people may feel isolated, which in turn inhibits response. The dynamic is also adversely affected when actors try to involve the audience more than they want to be involved, so that audience participation becomes a “threat rather than a pleasure”.

Relating these conclusions from the data to Goffman’s (1990) work on interaction and Putnam’s (2000) ideas about interpersonal communication in everyday life, the research performances provided a “rich medium of communication” (Putnam 2000:176), where audience response was very good, enabling a close examination of communication processes. In support of Putnam’s ideas, early audience response and immediacy of response produced speed of feedback. Depth of feedback, or how much feedback there was, came through audience members’ shared knowledge of the plays. The actors used non-verbal messages (Goffman 1990:14 et seq; Putnam 2000:175), for example facial and vocal

expressions, gestures, postures and movements, to build communication with the audience and encourage response.

Extending Putnam's ideas about how interpersonal communication builds trust and community, the data suggest a number of other contributory features. The performances relied on careful listening and appropriate silence, indicating that feedback does not have to be overt for the audience to be appreciative. Both playwright and actors influence response: the playwright through how the dialogue is written, and the actors through their pace, timing and delivery of the lines. This understanding of actors' techniques develops Goffman's (1990) work on interaction in everyday life, illustrating how individuals "manage" the information they "give" and "give off" (14 et seq) to their listeners. Where communication is being received by a number of people in everyday life, their response is influenced by awareness of others, emotional contagion, and collectivity of response, as it is in the theatre. The section in the data on problematic interaction between audience and actors suggests where communication in everyday life can also fail and thus produce exclusion. Examples of this are genuinely poor response, where the audience does not appreciate the performance, and overstepping comfortable boundaries of interaction, where actors attempt to interact with the audience too much. Transferring this to everyday life suggests perhaps overbearing or intrusive ways of communicating. Continuing the idea of communication with a group of people, size of theatre audiences impacts upon community formation. The data support Bennett's (1997) view that full houses lead to confident and collective response. They also give some idea as to how small houses lead to poor response and lack of community formation. Small audiences can feel isolated and intimidated, and there is less emotional contagion. Respondents indicate that size of house is very important to the actors and to the interaction between audience and actors. The data suggest that very large houses in very large auditoria can produce either a 'mob' attitude, which may be seen as threatening and leading to exclusion, or as a magnification of the theatre audience experience and conducive to community formation. These features of audiences and their potential for producing community or exclusion relate to everyday life situations such as lectures or meetings, where communication takes place with a group of people.

Turning now to the influence of theatre auditoria on audience response and community experience, I extend Atkinson's (1984) and Heritage and Greatbatch's (1986) work on audience response at political meetings in large halls by considering the impact on audience response of different sizes and shapes of auditoria. The data indicate that characteristics of theatre auditoria that encourage community formation include the auditorium being at least appropriate for the production in hand, and preferably enhancing it. This finding supports Harris's (1999) view that the venue is very important to the production, and suggests that this is because audience response and community experience are heightened when producers have matched production and venue. It also illustrates Brook's idea (in Wallace 1995) that the character of the environment should contribute to the theatre experience. Other characteristics of auditoria that contribute to community formation are smaller auditoria, of around four hundred seats, which provide intimacy and closeness, and encourage the audience to feel part of the performance, or involved in it. This supports Macintosh's (1993) view that smaller auditoria tend to produce more creative theatre than larger ones. As well as the intimacy and involvement respondents experience, they also point out that there is more chance of a full house in smaller auditoria, which, in agreement with Bennett (1997), also encourages audience response. As Alexander (1995) indicates, small Studio spaces can increase the self-consciousness of the audience. The data suggest that this occurs when they feel too close to the actors and withdraw from them. However, such spaces can allow actors to be more immediately aware of response, and audiences to experience greater intimacy and involvement, thus encouraging audience response and community experience. In support of theatre practitioners' idea that an awareness of other audience members and the collective nature of a theatre event encourages response, the in the round or thrust configuration at The Octagon is appreciated by many of the respondents, as well as the director of *Private Lives*, as a "magical space". Respondents add that the absence of the fourth wall enhances interaction between actors and audience, allowing them to feel part of the performance. In accord with both Brook (in Wallace 1995) and Macintosh (1993), the data indicate that a sense of community is encouraged when most of the audience are above the actors' eyeline, as they are at The Octagon and at Theatre by the Lake in its alternative configuration. This is because the actors have to play up to the audience, opening up their characters to them and inviting them in to the

performance. Finally in this consideration of the characteristics of auditoria that encourage audience response, respondents like to try different spaces. They have found horseshoe and courtyard configurations conducive to audience response, and sometimes, despite problems with the weather and audibility, open air venues have enhanced productions. Again this supports the importance Brook (in Wallace 1995) attaches to the character of the venue and its contribution to the production.

The physical aspects of some auditoria present a drawback to community experience. The data provide some explanation for why large auditoria can be less than satisfactory for audience experience. Actors feel the relative lack of immediacy of response. Audience members can experience difficulty in hearing or seeing because they are too high up or too far away from the action to feel involved. There can be over-amplification of the sound and generally too much noise and too many people for their comfort. Respondents have also been unimpressed by uncomfortable seating and auditoria that have "no atmosphere [or] sense of occasion". Examples include an auditorium where there is a lot of glass and concrete, and another, which is a very large open space resembling a warehouse. An auditorium that the audience considers inappropriate for the production does not engender a sense of community. This may be, for example, a "strong" production in a very small space, where the audience tends to "draw away" from the actors. The fourth wall produced by the proscenium arch can be a "barrier" to communication, but use of the apron in front of the arch helps to reduce this effect. Lastly, it is harder for the audience to feel involved in the performance where many of them are below the actors' eyeline. The data support theatre practitioners' ideas on the characteristics of auditoria and their conduciveness to audience response. Further, they provide some explanation as to why certain features of auditoria encourage audience response and community experience more than others. These characteristics influence the interpersonal communication that takes place at theatre performances. They are also transferable to the physical contexts of interpersonal communication in everyday life in situations such as talks or meetings.

Theatre performances have considerable potential for generating community experience through the co-present interactions that take place there. By examining

respondents' views on the features of these interactions and the physical characteristics of theatre auditoria, I have identified some of the communication processes that encourage or discourage a sense of community both in the theatre and in everyday life. Feeling part of the event is something that respondents constantly refer to. From Chapter Five we can extract the importance of live performance to this feeling of involvement. Chapter Six has added especially the need for a smaller venue and an in the round experience, where participants are aware of each other, to encourage the formation of community.

In the last two chapters I have discussed how the data on theatregoers' contextual backgrounds and on the co-present interactions that take place at theatre performances have shed light on community experience. I have included respondents' views on theatre auditoria, which are part of audience context and contribute to response and the formation of community. In Chapter Seven, I continue the trajectory of the whole theatregoing experience by considering changes in audience perception at the performance and beyond. I discuss what changes the director and actor respondents would like their audiences to experience, and how audience member respondents were affected by the performances. I begin to examine how such changes in audience perception are shared, contributing to our understanding of processes of community formation.

CHAPTER SEVEN
THE PERFORMANCE AND BEYOND

Introduction

The overarching concern of this chapter and much of Chapter Eight is to understand how interpretive communities are formed and re-formed through shared changes in audience perception. Theatre audience members bring their previous theatregoing histories to performances, and the changes they experience both during performances and afterwards influence their participation in interpretive communities. As outlined in Chapter Two, audience changes can take place psychologically, like the identifications Stacey (1994) suggests, and socio-politically, such as discussed in the classic realism debate (Williams 1979, MacCabe 1981, McArthur 1981).

The data suggest that both these types of changes take place and that there is a third type, which I identify as cultural. The diagram on the following page indicates the components of this categorization and the relevant literature. The first type I refer to as affective changes, which relate to the psychological type. Affective changes are aspects of the performance the audience members identify with, and that have an emotional impact on them. I relate the data to Stacey's (1994) work on processes of identification and to that of Grossberg (1992) on affective sensibility. Baym's (2000) ideas on personalized interpretations and Liebes and Katz's (1993) description of referential interpretations also contextualize the discussion. The second type I term cognitive changes, and these relate to the socio-political type. Cognitive changes are ideas and issues the performances stimulate audience members to think about. Through their ideas on critical interpretations of themes and issues, Liebes and Katz again provide a framework. Relevant here too is Williams's (1979) work on indicative and subjunctive realism, and MacCabe (1981) and McArthur's (1981) debate on whether texts do encourage questions in audiences' minds. I have incorporated 'pleasure' with 'enjoyment' rather than interpreting it psychoanalytically, as previous literature does (Stacey 1994, Hills 2002, Sandvoss 2005). I have been guided by my data in this redefinition of categories because, as will be seen especially in Chapter Eight, pleasure and enjoyment are shown to be linked together as a significant feature of respondents' sharing and community formation. I relate the pleasure and enjoyment changes that respondents derive from

the performance both to Liebes and Katz's (1993) critical interpretations, where these refer to structure, genre and production, and to Radway's (1991), Kippax's (1988) and Stacey's (1994) ideas on how cultural consumption can be a pleasurable escape from everyday life.

In discussing the data, I first look at the changes in audience perception the producers, that is the director and actors, hope to achieve through their performances of *Private Lives* and *Blithe Spirit*. This provides an overview of the subject matter of the plays and the issues they raise, as well as indicating how the audience member respondents might be affected by the plays, and the pleasure and enjoyment they may experience. Second, I discuss the audience member respondents' experiences, or changes in perception, according to the affective, cognitive, and cultural types I have defined. In the conclusion I draw out the main themes emerging from the data, relating them to the literature, and showing how they illuminate the formation and re-formation of interpretive communities.

Producers' Expectations

The director and actors do not suggest the affective identifications audience members might make, because these are personal, as I show in the section on audience member experiences. However, they do work to effect audience changes on cognitive issues, and sometimes this is through the emotional impact they create. There is thus a link between affective, or psychological, and cognitive, or socio-political, types of changes. As Peter, the director of *Private Lives*, explains,

> There are issues of infidelity, adultery, jealousy and domestic violence. It was interesting that the 'fight scene' provoked shock as well as laughter. That's what we tried to do: to eke out those difficult moments in the play where domestic violence isn't funny . . . [We hope the audience sees] the play beyond its superficiality and [understands] the deeper things that are going on in it as well as the lighter ones.

Kate is one of the actors in the 'fight scene'. I quote her description of this scene, and audience reaction to it, because this is a moment in the performance of *Private Lives* that has provoked changes, both affective and cognitive, among audience members. She says,

> Certainly the violence is two-sided in this. When I break the record over Elyot's head, there is hysterical laughter, and he hits me back straight away. Silence. Then, as the fight continues, people get more comfortable with it. Neither character is the victim; there's no abuser and abused; both are equally violent.

Ged discusses the cognitive changes he expects the performance of *Private Lives* to stimulate on the themes of relationships and violence.

> I think it will make [the audience] think about the relationships they have with themselves and everybody else around them. Violence is a big theme in the play . . . I think it will make people think about the way they respond to violence in themselves and towards their partners. Perhaps it will make people admit that we all have a very ambivalent and complicated relationship with discomfort, pain and our emotions. If you pretend it isn't in you, or that the potential isn't there, then you're ignoring something.

It is important to the actors in both *Private Lives* and *Blithe Spirit* that the audience sees the plays as relevant to the issues of today. As Kate says,

> [*Private Lives*] is relevant now because it's a completely different way of looking at marriages breaking up through domestic violence and divorce. It happens nowadays so much more often. I don't think it necessarily makes it any better or worse; it's just something you're more used to.

About *Blithe Spirit*, Nigel says,

> It is a period piece . . . [but] you have to get through that and say this play has something to say, which is true of now as much as it was true of then . . . It shows life's squabbles, and is interesting in that there is something perpetual about this debate [on] jealousy . . . I think it's important to present these characters as humans, not as people who could only exist in 1940 . . . You want the audience to see that these are real people, and they're tender and funny and a bit sad . . . People [also] like to see the leisured classes come unstuck now and again, with their pomposity pricked a little. There's enough gentle wisdom in it to give people just a little to go away with.

Penny summarizes the issues raised in *Blithe Spirit* that she considers the audience might think about.

> Eternally, the relationship issue . . . Also the spiritual side of things, which has seen a surge in the last ten years, the whole 'new age' thing, and the fact that people are open to exploring the spiritual . . . The servant issue as well, since this was a time when relatively ordinary people had servants.

The section on audience member experiences shows the extent to which the director's and actors' expectations of the audience's consideration of cognitive issues are fulfilled, as well as the emotional impact of particular scenes.

In terms of the pleasure and enjoyment the director and actors would like their audiences to experience, Kate says she hopes people will realise that "a night at the theatre is enjoyable", and that neither theatre in general nor Noël Coward are "fuddy-duddy". Penny wants *Blithe Spirit* to "make [the audience] laugh, which has got to be a good thing in the current climate [of the war in Iraq]". The first thing Nigel would like the audience to have is "a pleasurable, relaxed evening in the theatre", and similarly Peter hopes, "They have a very good time, a very, very good night out." There is one final comment in this section, which is made by Nigel and refers to the transformative power of theatre and the meaning of theatre generally in people's lives. He says, "[A play can be] a way of addressing a problem in a fascinating way. If it's upsetting, perhaps it should be in a way. It doesn't mean to say it's a negative experience." In the next section I show how far audience member experiences are in keeping with the director's and actors' expectations, and, indeed, where they exceed them.

Audiences' Experiences

I have described *Private Lives* and *Blithe Spirit* as comedy dramas and, while the comedy content has assisted our understanding of audience response, the more serious side of the plays produces a wider range of changes in audience perception than if the plays had been simply comedies. During the interviews audience member respondents shared many experiences with me, some of which were in considerable depth. As I show in this chapter and in Chapter Eight, affective and pleasure and enjoyment changes are shared through audience response at performances, indicating existing interpretive communities. Such changes may also be shared subsequently through discussion with others, thus contributing to community formation and re-formation. Cognitive changes, on the other hand, generally take place later, as respondents are assessing the impact of performances while going on with their everyday lives. How far changes are spontaneously shared with other people subsequently, and therefore relate to community experience outside the auditorium, is

a matter I take up in Chapter Eight, where I look at the wider theatre event. Here I focus on the nature of the changes in perception respondents experienced. I discuss the data according to the three types of changes set out above.

Affective Identifications

In this section I discuss what respondents identified with in the performances, and also anything else that had an emotional impact on them. I relate the data to the literature on identifications and referential interpretations as outlined in the introduction to this chapter. In my exploratory research at Blackpool Grand Theatre respondents preferred to consider themselves 'admirers' of actors and playwrights rather than 'fans'. The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake respondents identify affectively with themes in the plays and the characters rather than the actors themselves, and so do not follow Stacey's (1994) processes of identification with stars. This is perhaps a major difference between fans, or admirers, of drama, television programmes or films, and fans of stars. An example of respondents identifying with themes in the plays is how at *Private Lives*, the older respondents say they identified with the period in which the play is set, that is the 1930s. Jean is one of these, and also Alice, who says, "Noël Coward was my generation, so it meant a lot to me . . . it brings back memories for me." While there is little in the data to suggest that theatregoers' quantitative strength of investment in their cultural consumption is any less than that of fans of more popular genres, this also serves as an example of Grossberg's (1992) qualitative affect, indicating that Coward's plays matter to these respondents through their representation of an era they remember. Respondents' other identifications closely follow Baym's (2000) personalized and Liebes and Katz's (1993) referential interpretations, and certainly suggest, as do these authors, that there is emotional involvement. Examples of these are where respondents identified personally with the themes of divorce, infidelity and jealousy in the plays. Jack has been divorced, as, he told me, has his wife. For Jim "the cheating and the lying . . . [are] very familiar unfortunately", and Ruth confides, "I could identify with the jealousy, with the female being jealous of her husband having somebody else in his life, loving somebody else. I could identify with that very strongly." Enid thinks the attitude of husbands and wives to each other in *Private*

Lives is "very typical of married people", and relates this to her own marriage. She says,

> When you see your own husband saying or doing something, you get a shock sometimes, and other times you think, 'Why's he said that?' . . . There are times when you think '[Coward's] put that very well.'

Taking up this idea of Coward writing about 'typical' marital relationships, among the *Blithe Spirit* respondents Sally remarks, "I think we all identified with the wife driven mad by the husband." Similarly, Muriel found *Blithe Spirit* "true to life. You could see yourself in some of the reactions". More generally, Joan thinks, "You can always find something in every play you go to see that you can identify with. There is some little bit always. Little things that you can see."

Like the *Private Lives* respondents, and again illustrating both how the plays mattered to them and showing how they related the content to their own lives, some of the *Blithe Spirit* sample remembered and identified with the 1940s. Louise relates her memories of this period as follows:

> The radiogram took me back a bit! We used to have one. I wasn't around when the warnings during the war were on, but I was born in 1948, and we were still very much in the immediate post-war era. The costumes were very true to life. In fact, my Mum used to have a dress that was very much like one that one of the characters wore.

Barbara also remembers her mother's clothes in that period, saying, "When I saw the fashions I thought, 'Oh yes, that's what Mum used to wear.'" Similarly, Derek explains why he has vivid memories of the shoes at that time.

> I noticed the shoes, and I remember the shoes, because my father . . . used to make those in the fifties . . . When shoes were still rationed, on coupons, my father used to make them for the black market. Wooden wedge heels. I remember them well. I've got all the patterns.

Several respondents have indirect or personal experience of spiritualism, which is a major theme in *Blithe Spirit*, and they related this to their own lives. Pam recalls a family connection with spiritualism, in that her father had written up the activities of his aunt, who was a medium. Bernard tells of his own experience at a séance, while Julie herself used to attend the Spiritualist Church, and thinks the "mockery of alternative beliefs" as portrayed in *Blithe Spirit* "[is] the norm".

There are one or two instances of emotional impact on respondents, in addition to the identifications made above, which must be mentioned in this section on affective changes. They are examples of how affective changes can link to and stimulate cognitive changes. The first is David's outrage that the wealthy 'bright young things' in *Private Lives* could behave as they did "just because [they're] rich". He says, "The male lead . . . was arrogant and had got married and divorced, made a big mistake in his life, and then just went straight back to it again as though nothing had happened." The emotional impact of this character's behaviour on respondents underlies their cognitive discussion of the issue of social class. The second example of emotional impact on respondents is the violence, in the 'fight scene' in *Private Lives*, that both Helen and Ruth discuss. Helen says that "the violence, that flash of violence", had a big impact on her, and Ruth thinks, "The violence affected me. It quite disturbed me really. This male/female divide. It brought that home." Again this emotional impact links to a cognitive discussion of the issue of domestic violence. I have suggested above that cognitive changes take place subsequently, as respondents assess the impact of the performance while going on with their everyday lives, and I discuss how the research performances were a stimulus to thought for audience members in the next section.

A Stimulus to Thought

Cognitive changes are constituted by those ideas and issues the performances stimulate respondents to think about, raising questions in their minds. As such they are relevant first to what Liebes and Katz (1993) refer to as critical interpretations, which relate to themes and issues in the text, and are emotionally more distant than referential interpretations. Second, they contribute to the classic realism debate as to whether texts do bring audiences to question the issues raised. Ruth, one of the respondents from the *Private Lives* sample, raises the initial question of how much a play like this does stimulate thought, in comparison with more recent drama.

> I think modern plays give you more to think about. They leave it open and invite you to create your own scenarios around the characters. I find I do that. If that's the sort of play I've seen, I do think about it a lot afterwards. With *Private Lives* it's complete in itself, and it doesn't encourage you to conjure up anything else. That's it. Take it or leave it. It's there.

Here Ruth is describing the difference between indicative and subjunctive realism as set out by Raymond Williams (1979). Charles's reaction to *Private Lives* is similar to Ruth's. He says,

> It's another little world, which is always interesting . . . I tend to look on it as social commentary on a rather peculiar aspect of life in that particular age: the set who don't seem to have to work, but swan through life, going on cruises, drinking champagne, smoking, and getting into marital problems. I don't think it has much to teach us, so I just treat it as commentary on that particular aspect of life.

However, the data show that the performances of *Private Lives* and *Blithe Spirit* had stimulated respondents to ask themselves questions about the themes the plays present. In this section I focus on these questions, and indicate particular points of contact with the director's and actors' expectations of changes in audience perception. Overall, respondents had thought about the universal themes presented in the plays and the issues of morality these raise. They include issues in relation to social class, relationships between the sexes, and domestic violence. Respondents also address ideas on the theme of spiritualism in *Blithe Spirit*, which is perhaps less universal but is, as Bernard says, "a subject that every now and again comes up". Before discussing the data on these themes, I look at the comparisons respondents make between the period in which the plays are set and today, and at how they found the plays relevant to the present time.

The performances encouraged respondents to think about the period in which the plays are set and to make comparisons between life then and now. For Louise, "[*Blithe Spirit*] portrayed the times very well, so it makes you think about another era." Beryl contrasts the *Private Lives* characters' social life with that of today.

> Socially, it was a very extravagant side of life in that they were just travelling all the time. They didn't have a base; they could just buzz off from one place to the next. In this day and age, the majority of people tend not to live like that. Perhaps the most they'd have would be a villa in Spain.

Jean focuses on differences between attitudes towards people living together in the 1930s and today. She says, "In those days, of course, living together was a considerably more horrific thing than it is now. It's commonplace nowadays . . . [and] divorce is neither here nor there." Alice notes how "society has changed

tremendously over the years", but observes that "basic feelings and instincts are still the same as you go through life", thus hinting at the universal themes addressed in *Private Lives*. Barbara summarizes the themes of social relationships presented in *Blithe Spirit*, and indicates her attitude to the morality of that age. She thinks the play deals with "ideas of social station, the attitude to the maid, the husband's attitude to the wife", and says, "They were all of the time, whereas today you'd think they're not acceptable, not acceptable [sic]." I noted in the section on the director's and actors' expectations of audience changes that it was important to them that their audiences thought the performances were relevant to the issues of today; and this is in fact the case. For Bernard, "This particular performance of *Blithe Spirit* was still a very witty and amusing play, and it hadn't dated." Helen found *Private Lives* especially relevant to the issue of domestic violence.

> I thought it was going to be dated and irrelevant, but it wasn't irrelevant. It was very interesting at the director's talk afterwards, how what seemed to come out most was the hitting over the head with the record, and that's very relevant to today . . . It came out that it was alright because they both enjoyed it, and she hit him back. I'm not so sure about that.

The performance encouraged her to question the morality of marital disputes when both partners are violent.

Both plays approach the theme of social class, and the performances stimulated respondents to consider the nature of the upper class at that time, and their own attitudes towards how such people behaved. Helen describes the characters in *Private Lives* and her view of the lives they led.

> [*Private Lives*] addresses the social mores of the time and the emptiness of [the characters'] lives. They were on this treadmill. It's how you appear, that's who you are. You have to have the right clothes and be seen in the right places. A very empty sort of life. There didn't seem to be much behind it.

In *Blithe Spirit*, Derek says, "You are looking at a different lifestyle, a different era, when people had servants . . . You see a stratum from a bygone age and the way they handled servants." Joan expresses how she feels about this saying, "The second wife was very snobbish, of course. The way they treated servants; that wasn't very good at all."

The relationship between the sexes is the central theme of both plays. I quote at length respondents' views on how the performances raised issues about relationships to show the extent of their cognitive changes in this area. The performance of *Private Lives* encouraged Jean to think about these relationships, and of "how easily they can be thrown away, and then perhaps regretting [this] afterwards". Ruth had thought in some depth about how *Private Lives* portrayed relationships, and she compares this to relationships today.

> [Noël Coward] could only see [marital relationships] in terms of clashes of temper and temperament, because the male and female roles were so defined, so different; they were poles apart. Nowadays we tend to think there is a little bit of the opposite gender in all of us. We tend to see each other as individuals rather than in male or female roles.

Ruth also outlines the issues she feels the production addresses, and discusses violence in marriage.

> [*Private Lives* addresses] the whole [issue of] male and female gender roles; relationships in marriage and violent relationships in marriage; how people accept that, and how it becomes part of the relationship. Sometimes, they say . . . it keeps them together: love/hate relationships that they seem to have.

Rob had thought about how the characters in *Private Lives* reacted in the situations they found themselves in, and related this to his own life. He says, "I'm interested in how people's minds work and in their relationships, because I'm involved in pastoral work at the church." His thoughts are close to the actor Ged's wish that the audience would acknowledge the ambivalence towards violence in their own personalities. Rob describes his thought processes as follows:

> That's how people behave and react sometimes. It might be how you would react in your own imagination. Sometimes you work out in your own mind how you might behave in particular situations. You might want to behave in a certain way, but don't in practice. You might compare yourself to the characters and think how you would react. Am I like him or not? How would I behave? What is acceptable behaviour, publicly or behind closed doors?

Among the *Blithe Spirit* respondents, Annette and Bernard especially had thought quite deeply about the issues the performance raised in terms of relationships between the sexes. Annette outlines these issues in the quotation below:

> [Coward] actually shows the complication of marriage and the relationship between husband and wife; the relationship with the ['other'] woman; the way they reacted; the relationship he had with each wife, which was quite different: how they were different people and the effect they had on the man. I thought it was all very interesting.

Bernard adds to this the idea of bereavement, and gives his own views of the issues raised concerning relationships.

> [The performance] addressed the whole issue of bereavement and relationships, [and] the question about his two marriages and his relationship with his wives, even though it was treated humorously. You wondered just what his relationship had been with his first wife, whether he was in fact dominated by her, or what kind of relationship they had. It sounded by the end as if their relationship was extremely, not to say fiery perhaps, but based upon rather shifting foundations, with the remarks made about other relationships, other liaisons that they had. So, it raised all these questions about marriage relationships, and how far one can be honest with one another, and how one works these things out. The two wives appear to have been quite different, and his relationship with each of them had adapted, I suppose, as they tend to. So it did raise questions about marriage relationships.

Considering now the theme of spiritualism in *Blithe Spirit*, Gwen made the interesting comment that she "looked at the spiritualism as a means of showing the human relationships, rather than as being significant in itself". This suggests that for her the relationships in the play were more important than the spiritualism. For other respondents, however, the issue of spiritualism proved thought-provoking and raised questions in their minds. Louise notes Coward's light-hearted approach to spiritualism, but says, "I would have thought spiritualism was to be taken a lot more seriously." Kay suggests that "perhaps [the play] opens your mind a little bit . . . it could make you think about the possibilities of there being life on the 'other side'". Both Beth and Vic wondered about the implications of spiritualism as it was portrayed in the play. Beth says, "It set you to thinking when people die whether they do hang around as spirits or not. It does make you think, 'Well someone could be watching me.'" The play stimulated Vic to think about spiritualism and second marriages. He says,

> Be careful when you marry your second wife! I know it's far-fetched, and I don't suppose it would ever happen, but if someone is married

> for a second time and you start talking about the first wife too often I suppose you could say that was a ghost.

The spiritualism in *Blithe Spirit* raised the question for Pam as to whether it "[taps] into people's vulnerability". Bernard offers the view that mediums can be helpful to the recently bereaved, for example, and asks, "Does it really matter whether it's true or not if it helps people?" Bernard himself discusses the issue of spiritualism in depth, and again I quote at some length to illustrate just how much the play had encouraged respondents to think about the themes and question them.

> Noël Coward was very, I don't know whether cynical is the right word, but certainly it wasn't something he believed in; but many people have, quite eminent people. It's not something that's easy just to dismiss out of hand . . . In *Blithe Spirit* it was done in the context of a comedy . . . Nevertheless, it raised quite serious issues, which are there in the play, around denying it. It made one think, 'Well what about these people who are mediums?' And there are still a number of them around. 'What about it? Are they genuine? Are they not?' And so on. One has to ask these questions.

I began this section with Ruth's concern about whether a play like *Private Lives* could raise questions in audience members' minds. The above data show extensively that both *Private Lives* and *Blithe Spirit* did exactly that for the respondents. Even though Coward wrote these plays to entertain rather than with any socio-political motive, they have stimulated considerable thought about the social issues raised. Furthermore, they are shown to be very relevant to issues of the present day. These findings may not perhaps be extended to allow comment on television realist drama and Raymond Williams's (1979) optimistic or MacCabe's (1981) and McArthur's (1981) more pessimistic views, but along with John McGrath (1996) and theatre practitioners such as Tony Kushner (in Eyre and Wright 2000:337) it certainly supports an encouraging view of the transformative power of live drama. If this is so for the mainstream drama of these research performances, then an even stronger case could be made for the transformative power of experimental or avant-garde drama. Further, if such changes are shared and people form communities on this basis, there is an argument to support the view that community can influence social change rather than that social change impacts negatively on community. Having reviewed here

audience member respondents' cognitive changes in perception, I turn now to the pleasure and enjoyment they derived from the performances.

Pleasure and Enjoyment

The data show that the director's and actors' expectations that their audiences will have an enjoyable evening at the theatre and that the performances will make them laugh are fulfilled. Such laughter and enjoyment contribute to Radway's (1991), Kippax's (1988) and Stacey's (1994) ideas on cultural consumption as a pleasurable escape, and I detail the extent of this idea in respondents' theatregoing in the course of the discussion. Further, audience member respondents describe the pleasure they take in the plays, performances and production. These cultural changes follow Liebes and Katz's (1993) ideas on critical interpretations, where they refer to structure, genre and conventions of production. They also complement the actors' ideas outlined in Chapter Six about the structure and dialogue of Coward's plays. I discuss the data first on the pleasure respondents take in the plays, the performances and the production, and second on their enjoyment generally of their evening at the theatre.

The data are extensive on the structure, genre and production element in critical interpretations that Liebes and Katz identify, showing that it is an important part of respondents' interpretation of the performances. At *Private Lives* Jack was impressed by "the play itself", and thinks, "Noël Coward is an excellent playwright." For Liz it is "a really 'fun' play", and Rob comments, "There is a lot going on . . . a lot of variety in it." Respondents appreciated the structure of the play and the dialogue. Beryl and Jim remark that the storyline is very good, and Ruth says she enjoyed

> how well it was written and how it all came together at the end. It fitted together; it was so neat. It flowed well . . . the writing was concise [and] there weren't any wasted words. It flowed smoothly and quickly.

Rob agrees, saying, "It kept moving and held your attention", and Charles comments, "The dialogue is great to hear, the smart repartee and so on". All respondents enjoyed the humour in *Private Lives*, whether they were disposed to laugh out loud, or only "inwardly" (Susan).

The profile for *Blithe Spirit* respondents' pleasure in the play is very similar. Kay appreciated the "cleverness of the play itself", Louise thought the "script was very clever", and Vic describes it as "a jovial play". Annette outlines the structure of the play as follows:

> I thought the relationship between the man and his two wives was quite interesting. How he behaved towards the two, the interrelation, and how it all kind of resolved at the end. The two wives were on one side and he was on the other. How it all kind of changed over.

Summarizing these aspects of *Blithe Spirit*, Bernard comments, "I enjoyed the dialogue and the playwriting as well as the performance." Again, respondents appreciated what Pam describes generally as "Noël Coward's humour", and Joan comments, "It's a tonic, isn't it, to have a good laugh." It is important to recognize that these critical interpretations that respondents make can also be part of the pleasure they take in the performance.

The acting is a very important part of respondents' interpretation and pleasure, and they comment on this in terms of individual actors, technique, particular scenes and the cast as a whole. Liz thought the "female lead was very good" in *Private Lives*, and Jack felt, "The maid stole the show. She was brilliant. She sparkled and stole the whole thing." Showing her appreciation of acting technique, Enid comments,

> The voices were clear. You didn't have to strain to listen. The humour was there. The audience were laughing, and that's a timing thing, isn't it, so if it's not well done it doesn't come off.

Beryl noted that the actors "seemed fit" especially in the "falling out" scenes. Most *Private Lives* respondents enjoyed the acting of the cast as a whole. As Karen says, "There were just four people in it mainly, and they worked so hard. You could tell how much they put into it." Alice felt the actors played with "passion and sincerity . . . They were so good". There were one or two criticisms of the acting. While Jack thought the maid was very good, he felt the cast overall may have been having an 'off' night. Charles, too, thought, "The actors weren't quite sharp enough in their characters. You know when you've seen something exceptional and I didn't quite feel that with this production." These are the criticisms of regular and knowledgeable

theatregoers, who are making comparisons with the many other productions they have seen.

In Coward's plays the maid often has a significant cameo role, and the *Blithe Spirit* respondents were divided about her performance. Vic thought she was very good but three other respondents felt her performance was weak. Respondents remarked on how well the scene where the first wife appears as a ghost was done. Annette, for example, says, "It was very cleverly done when the two [wives] were there to start with, and the second wife couldn't see the first wife and the husband was talking to her." Julie noted the difference between amateur and professional acting, since the last performance she had seen had been an amateur production. Marjorie consolidates this, saying how much she appreciated the professionalism of the actors. For Annette the actors "were all working together very, very well . . . They were working as a team", and Joan says, "They really did make it come out at me." Louise summarizes how audience members can gain pleasure from the acting, saying,

> I think the way that the characters were actually portrayed . . . affects you, because that's how you enjoy the performance . . . everybody, each actor, played their part . . . The acting was superb . . . I thought it was a wonderful performance.

Apart from the play and the performances, respondents also interpret and take pleasure in the production generally. For both performances respondents commented particularly on the effects, costume, sets and the production as a whole. *Private Lives* respondents remarked on how well the fight scenes were done. Jean, for example says,

> They didn't come over as staged fights; they came over as though they were really fighting, and that's not easy. It's not easy to knock furniture and things about without it looking staged.

Jill, Beryl and Enid all appreciated the costume, which was typical of the 1930s. Susan and especially Jack, with his backstage experience, took pleasure in the sets, as did Helen, who speaks for other respondents when she says, "It was a successful evening altogether really."

Blithe Spirit respondents also enjoyed the effects, especially at the beginning of the play. Annette mentions the radiogram giving air raid warnings, and Julie says, "It didn't half make me jump when the bomber was going overhead." The 1940s costumes were appreciated particularly by Muriel, Derek and Barbara, who says, "They were really, really good." Most respondents thought the set was very good and well lit, giving the impression of a large house, with attention to detail in the artefacts used, and effective at the end when everything comes tumbling down off the walls. Annette says, "The backstage side was very, very well done", and Richard comments, "The whole production was of a piece, so it was the same sort of standard across everything . . . I think that's probably quite a good thing." For Muriel, "The whole production was good." Respondents thus interpret and take pleasure in a wide range of aspects of the performances, including details of the play, the acting and the production.

I turn now to other less specific aspects of respondents' pleasure and enjoyment in the research performances and theatre generally in their lives, and view these in the context of Radway's (1991), Kippax's (1988) and Stacey's (1994) ideas about cultural consumption as a pleasurable escape. At the research performances, respondents' overall enjoyment of their evening at the theatre is comprehensive, in that all respondents had a good night out, and most of them considerably so. For *Private Lives* Helen says, "It was a highly enjoyable evening", and Jean remarks on how much she enjoyed her night out. Among the *Blithe Spirit* respondents, illustrating Kippax's identification of excitement as a factor in women's cultural consumption, Louise says, "It was exciting [and] entertaining", and Kay comments, "It was a good night and I enjoyed it."

Much of the data on respondents' pleasure and enjoyment in theatre generally in their lives arises from the question towards the conclusion of the interview, "Why, in the end, do you go to the theatre?" Two important areas in the meaning of theatre in respondents' lives have already been discussed in Chapter Five, namely their appreciation of live performance and theatregoing as a social activity with their

companions. Earlier in this chapter I drew attention to the thought-provoking element in theatregoing through respondents' cognitive changes and Nigel's reference to plays "addressing [problems] in a fascinating way". In this section on pleasure and enjoyment I have indicated how respondents interpret and enjoy the plays, the acting and the production. Here, therefore, the discussion develops respondents' views on the meanings of theatre in their lives, first in terms of entertainment and enjoyment, second through another aspect of their ideas on how theatre can stimulate thought, and third through a number of other meanings specific to individuals.

Some respondents say they like to be entertained when they go to the theatre, and generally this emphasizes the lighter side of drama. Kay, for example, comments, "I suppose we've seen more of the lighter stuff", and echoes Joan when she says, "Most people like to have a laugh, don't they?" Respondents also mention that relaxation is a significant aspect of their theatregoing. Rob expresses what theatre means to him as follows:

> I enjoy [theatre]. It is to relax more than anything. Perhaps I should look for more stimulation and thought, but I haven't studied the arts, so it's been more for entertainment than development.

While Kippax suggests that relaxation is an important element of women's appreciation of the arts, there is little reason to suppose that men do not enjoy this aspect of theatregoing as well. In stating that they enjoy theatre, respondents often add that live performance and the social aspect of being out with companions are important to them, as I indicated above. For some respondents, enjoyment seems an inadequate expression of how they feel about theatre, and they say they love it. This supports my earlier suggestion that theatregoers' strength of investment, in Grossberg's terms, is no less than that of fans of more popular culture. Louise says she goes to the theatre "to be entertained, and I love it", and Alice enthuses, "I do love the theatre and everything connected with it."

Expressing her own feelings in relation to her domestic situation, Julie comments, "I enjoy [theatre] and it's a night out away from the kids". Her remark suggests the first of two steps in theatre as a stimulus to thought. This is the

distraction from one's own life, or escape, and the second is engaging with the ideas and insights theatre can provide with regard to others' lives. Several respondents recognize both these steps. On theatre visits, Beryl says, "One expects to have a complete change from one's own life; to lose oneself into the imagination of what's happening on stage." Jean comments,

> When you're in the theatre you're not thinking about anything else. You're engrossed in that and it takes you out of yourself and occupies your mind for quite a time afterwards.

Pam describes the two steps as "a bit of escapism . . . [and] I suppose it's trying to put yourself into a different situation, looking at something that you haven't experienced personally". Focusing now on the second step of this process, the ideas and insights that theatre can provoke, Bernard remarks,

> We don't go to the theatre in order to be stimulated intellectually particularly, though that often happens, even with a play like *Blithe Spirit* . . . Most of the plays, especially the more serious ones, bring up a topic . . . where you do go away thinking about what they've been saying and doing.

Respondents acknowledge this thought-provoking aspect of theatre in a number of different ways. Enid describes theatre visits as "stimulating", and Liz says, "I really enjoy the stories and getting involved in them". Muriel finds that theatre visits can be educational: she says, "Sometimes when you go to plays you pick up on things you've never really thought about before." Gwen goes to the theatre for "stimulus and ideas . . . a lot of plays do give you a different view on life". Both Derek and Sally describe how theatre visits can influence their thinking. Derek comments,

> Sometimes ideas are put across, especially in Shakespeare, and you can come away feeling definitely uplifted. Sometimes you can get an insight into a problem, and theatre can make it quite clear by giving you a point of view. Quite a lot of plays I've seen . . . have been quite controversial and they make you think.

Sally explains why she goes to the theatre as follows:

> I always come away feeling as though I've seen something interesting. Some of the productions I've seen have touched on quite difficult areas: child abuse and different things. And you come away feeling that you've seen it from a different point of view . . . Productions in the [Theatre by the Lake] Studio are . . . often the ones that tend to touch on more difficult issues . . . So I've come away from some of [these] feeling I've maybe learned something.

Relating the above data to Radway's, Kippax's and Stacey's ideas about cultural consumption as escape from one's own life, it is clear that respondents do recognize this feature. More importantly, however, and as forcefully demonstrated above, they consider that their theatregoing is often thought-provoking, giving them insights into the lives of others. I argued in Chapter Five that among the female theatregoing groups in the sample there was little to suggest that escape from their domestic worlds was an important reason for their theatregoing. For these groups the social network was more significant. Looking at the sample overall, perhaps it is fair to say that the female respondents tend to emphasize escape from their own lives more than the men, who stress rather the ideas they are stimulated to think about.

There are some pleasures of theatregoing in respondents' lives that are specific to individuals in the sample, although they are undoubtedly to be found in the theatregoing population generally. The theatregoing companions Alice, Beryl and Charles all have a personal interest, through family connections and friends, in a number of actors, which influences them to see their productions. Similarly, Enid says she likes "to keep up with actors", although this is on a general rather than a personal basis. The fact that Gwen's daughter is a stage lighting technician influences her to go to different productions, "to support my daughter, or because we're interested in what she's doing". Two of the male members of the sample appreciate set design. Jack, having been involved in backstage work, enjoys the sets and scene changes. He says, "They're very clever at The Octagon with the sets. They're excellent." Derek describes what theatre sets mean to him as follows:

> I always look at the sets because I'm a designer. I taught design and I've always been interested in theatre and film sets. So sets are always important to me . . . If it's a poor set I'm upset. Definitely.

Last, but certainly not least here, since this resonates with the meaning of cultural consumption in women's lives as set out by Radway and Kippax especially, Joan says that theatre is something that is "just for me". I quote her in full:

> It's doing something that I really enjoy. It's something for me. Because I run my own business, I'm very committed to work. I want something just for me, and I think theatre is just for me.

Here, Joan is escaping from others' demands, but for her it is not from patriarchal domestic circumstances, but from the demands of others through her work situation. It seems reasonable to suggest that this could also apply to male theatregoers. In the conclusion I draw out the main themes emerging from the data on changes in audience perception, relating them to the literature, and showing how they illuminate the formation and re-formation of interpretive communities.

Conclusion

Producers' expectations of changes in audience perception are modest and, for the research performances, easily fulfilled and exceeded by the audience members' experiences. The director and actors hope that their audiences see the relevance of the plays to the present day, understand the deeper issues in the subject matter, and have an enjoyable evening at the theatre. They work to provide emotional impact, for example in the 'fight scene' in *Private Lives*, to point up some of these deeper issues. They identify the main themes of the plays as relationships between the sexes, social class and, in *Blithe Spirit*, spiritualism. These are universal themes, which lend themselves to audience identification and changes in perception. Relevance to the present day hinges on this universality and on seeing the characters as human rather than as caricatures of the period.

Audience members experience changes both at the performances and afterwards. I have suggested that affective and pleasure and enjoyment changes occur at the performance and subsequently, but that cognitive changes usually take place afterwards as respondents go on with their lives. Changes are shared at performances through audience response, which reflects interpretive community experience. Whether or not they are shared subsequently is a matter of how much they are discussed with others, and I take this up in Chapter Eight. The affective changes audience members experience include identification with the period, especially through artefacts and costume, and personal identifications with the relationship themes of infidelity, jealousy and divorce. Theatregoers' identifications are with themes in the play and the characters rather than according to the processes Stacey (1994) outlines for fans' identification with stars. There is little evidence in

the data to suggest that the affective sensibility of theatregoers is any less than that of fans of popular culture in terms of quantitative investment as defined by Grossberg (1992). An example of qualitative affect is respondents' identification with the period of the plays, showing how this matters to them through their memories of that time. Respondents relate the themes in the plays to their own lives through personalized interpretations, as Baym (2000) suggests, or the referential ones Liebes and Katz (1993) describe. Noteworthy areas of emotional impact on audience members are the behaviour of the upper social class of the period, and, as the director and actors anticipated, the domestic violence depicted in the 'fight scene'.

Such scenes of emotional impact often translate into cognitive changes as audience members go on with their everyday lives. Respondents made critical interpretations, in Liebes and Katz's (1993) terms, according to the themes and issues in the plays. Questions were raised in respondents' minds to a surprising degree, given the period in which the plays were written and their genre. While this cannot be generalized to the classic realist debate on television programmes, it does suggest that the transformative power of live drama is considerable. Individuals and communities can influence social change, rather than social change having an adverse impact on community. The questions raised in respondents' minds were discussed with me in the interviews, and I examine in Chapter Eight how far they are shared spontaneously with others. Respondents made comparisons between the social mores of the period in which the plays are set and the present day. These related especially to the issues of 'living together' and divorce, husbands' attitudes towards wives, and the treatment of servants. Respondents considered their own attitudes towards the lifestyle of the upper social classes of the period. The issue of domestic violence signalled for respondents the relevance of *Private Lives* to the present, and raised questions for them about the morality of violence by both partners. The extent of respondents' cognitive changes on relationships between the sexes is notable. They discussed and questioned male and female roles, bereavement and relationships, and violence in marriage and within oneself. The issue of spiritualism provoked questions such as whether mediums are genuine, and whether they take advantage of people's vulnerability or help them.

Audience member respondents' changes in perception relating to pleasure parallel Liebes and Katz's (1993) ideas on critical interpretations of structure, genre and production. Changes occur through respondents' interpretations of the plays, particularly their structure, dialogue and humour, the acting, and the production. They describe their pleasure in detail, and this complements the director's and actors' own views of the plays and performing them. Respondents' enjoyment is expressed through their appreciation of the evening as a whole. The changes respondents experienced at the research performances contribute to their enjoyment of theatre generally, which is built up over time. Some features of this, the live aspect of theatre, and theatregoing as a social activity, have been discussed in Chapter Five. Chapter Seven has added to these the entertainment and relaxation respondents gain from their theatre visits, as well as their enjoyment and love of theatre. Cognitive changes contribute to theatre as a stimulus to thought, and respondents appreciate both the distraction from their own lives and the ideas and insights theatre provides into issues and the lives of others. Relating these findings to the literature on women and cultural consumption, it is clear that male respondents also go to the theatre for relaxation. As far as escape from one's own life is concerned, more female than male respondents mention this, whereas the men emphasize the ideas they take away from performances. However, both female and male respondents say that theatre not only takes them out of themselves but also gives them insights into problems and the lives of others.

Some respondents have personal connections to the theatre world, which contribute to its meaning in their lives. These are such as friends or family members being involved in the theatre as performers or backstage, or an interest in design from a practical or professional standpoint. Finally, Joan speaks for many theatregoers when she says theatre is something "just for me". Here she is not escaping the demands of others in domestic situations, as Radway (1991) and Kippax (1988) find, but the demands of work. This also suggests that in the relaxation they find in theatre men too can escape from their work demands. In Chapter Eight, I take up the matter of just how much the changes in audience perception described in this chapter are spontaneously shared with others outside the theatre auditorium and in their everyday

lives, thus shedding further light on processes of community formation and re-formation. I do this in the context of the wider theatre event, looking at audience member experiences before and after the show.

CHAPTER EIGHT
BEFORE AND AFTER THE SHOW

Introduction

In this last chapter on the discussion of the data I focus on how community can be experienced through the whole theatre event. Taking up the issues raised in Chapter Seven about how far changes in audience perception are shared with others and thus influence community formation, I first discuss respondents' communication practices outside the theatre auditorium and in their everyday lives. As a preliminary consideration I look further at how respondents hear about productions, since this is revealing in terms of how much it involves interpersonal communication. In Chapter Five I discussed respondents' mediatized practices regarding reading theatre reviews and watching television programmes on theatre, and noted that these, especially the former, are fairly extensive. Discussion here focuses on respondents' communication practices immediately preceding the decision to attend the performance. The main focus in this first part of the chapter, however, is on how far the changes described in Chapter Seven are shared with others through discussion and debate. This sheds further light on how interpretive communities are formed and re-formed, and suggests how respondents experience community outside the auditorium and as they go on with their everyday lives. Baym (2000) emphasizes understanding "the spontaneous interpersonal interaction and social relations that make an audience a community" (209), and Tulloch (1990) stresses the need to examine the communication that takes place between viewers enabling individual changes to become communal. I have taken up these concerns in Chapter Six by examining interpersonal communication at performances, and I develop them further here by considering audience members' interactions in everyday life. In view of the urban context of The Octagon and the rural context of Theatre by the Lake, I also draw on Newby's (1985) study of conflict and community in rural areas to consider the significance of the differing contexts of the research theatres for community experience.

In the second part of the chapter examining the meanings of theatre places in theatregoers' lives, I discuss respondents' ideas on the facilities and buildings at The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake. I consider how they contribute to community

formation in the light of ideas on the emotional significance of place. I draw on the discussion by Sandvoss (2005) on the importance of these issues for fans, and relate the data to Young and Willmott's (1957) findings that people are more important than buildings in engendering community spirit. I again consider the data in the context of Newby's (1985) study of conflict and community in rural areas. In the conclusion I draw out the main themes arising from the data, and relate them to community experience. I begin with respondents' everyday communication practices.

Everyday Communication

In this section I consider first respondents' communication practices prior to attending the research productions. Second I examine the extent of their discussion with theatregoing companions and others, in order to assess how far these communication practices relate to community experience. I include here data on the director and actors' post-performance talk at The Octagon, which two audience member respondents and I myself attended. I also discuss both actors' and audience members' views on how the repertory system at Theatre by the Lake assists in the development of community experience.

Arranging Theatre Visits

I am concerned here with how far interpersonal communication influences decisions to attend productions. Most respondents are on the mailing list at either The Octagon or Theatre by the Lake. Of those who are not, Jean, who lives outside Bolton, read in a national newspaper that *Private Lives* was being produced, and Susan saw a poster in Bolton Town Hall where she works. However, Jill, and Karen and Jim heard about *Private Lives* through the people who organize their regular theatregoing groups, and Julie's mother asked whether she would like to go to *Blithe Spirit* with them. Also, for the majority who do receive the theatre brochures, arrangements to attend the performances are usually made through word of mouth, either in person or by telephone. For example, Alice contacted Beryl and Charles to see if they would like to attend *Private Lives*, and the theatregoing groups that go to all the main productions at each theatre contacted each other to arrange dates and book tickets. In addition, couples usually discuss their preferences for the productions they would like to see. Mostly, therefore, a fair amount of interpersonal communication is involved

in arranging theatre visits, which assists in the community formation of theatregoing groups.

Discussion and Community

Considering now the extent to which respondents discussed the performances with their theatregoing companions, there are one or two comments in the data that suggest how much sharing their experiences matters to them. Jean, for example, remarks, "You go over [the performance afterwards] in your mind, and particularly when you've gone with somebody you talk about it. It's very enjoyable." Similarly, Ruth says, "To me that's half the enjoyment of going, talking it over with people who've seen it as well." The changes in perception that respondents share with each other during the Intervals and immediately after the performances very largely concern pleasure and enjoyment: the pleasure they take in the plays, the acting and the production as a whole, and their overall enjoyment of the evening out. The changes described in the interviews of the affective and cognitive types are only occasionally mentioned to theatregoing companions. As discussed in Chapter Seven, cognitive changes tend to take place after the performances as respondents continue with their everyday lives, and affective changes are relatively personal. In terms of the cognitive changes that are shared among respondents, Helen and Ruth, who are theatregoing friends, talked about the violence in *Private Lives*, which had an impact on both of them. The affective changes discussed included "the cheating and the lying", again in *Private Lives*, and comparisons between the manners of the period and the present day for both plays.

Discussion among theatregoing companions of the pleasure and enjoyment type of changes includes references to the play itself, for example the story, the comedy and the dialogue; the acting of both individuals and the cast as a whole; and details of the production such as the set, lighting and costume. The two areas most frequently discussed are the acting and their own and each other's enjoyment. Reiterating what Jean and Ruth say about the importance to them of discussing productions, Jenny, who goes to Theatre by the Lake regularly with two female companions, comments, "Usually we do have a bit of an autopsy on what we felt about it." She adds, "Afterwards, if it's an early finish, we'll have a drink and just

mull over the performance . . . or what else is coming up, what's been on . . . So we do like that little bit of an opportunity to talk about it." Relating the data to Liebes and Katz's (1993) work, referential interpretations are shared only occasionally among the respondents, as are critical interpretations relating to themes and issues. However, critical interpretations on structure, genre and production are shared frequently and, for these respondents, reflect the pleasure and enjoyment they take in the plays, the acting and the production.

Moving on to how much respondents discussed the research performances they had seen with people other than their companions, this relates very much to their existing social networks. Only two of the *Private Lives* respondents say they did not discuss the performance with anyone other than their companions, whereas ten *Blithe Spirit* respondents say this. Of these, eight are retired and so do not talk to work colleagues. To illustrate these differing social networks, I quote first Liz, a childminder from the *Private Lives* sample, and then Derek, who is retired, from the *Blithe Spirit* respondents. Describing her everyday social contacts, Liz says, "I see quite a lot of people during the day and we tend to discuss what we've been doing or been to see the night before." The Octagon respondents, living near the city of Manchester, have well-developed social networks and experience interpersonal communication in discussing their activities. In contrast, Derek says,

> We moved into this area three years ago and we don't know anybody here. We're just very gradually making friends. We have one or two old friends within a radius of twenty miles, but we don't really see them that often.

Thus, while several of the incomers among the Theatre by the Lake respondents may have moved to Cumbria to avoid a highly mediatized and globalized society, this has not as yet enabled them to belong to a more communal society based on face-to-face interaction. In Newby's (1985) terms, the incomers in the rural area do not have community ties among themselves, neither do they communicate much with local residents. The local theatregoers, on the other hand, are more likely to form groups of theatregoing companions, and to share ideas on the productions they see. In discussing theatre buildings later in this chapter, I consider whether or not there is any conflict between theatregoing incomers and local residents.

Returning to focus on how far respondents discuss the research performances with people other than theatregoing companions, some would only mention a performance to others if they felt it had been particularly good. For example, Jill and Jack from the *Private Lives* sample, and Richard from the *Blithe Spirit* respondents, were not sufficiently impressed by the research performances to discuss them further with others. However, many respondents did mention the performances to other family members who live at home, or during telephone conversations with family who live elsewhere. Frequently these family members are not especially interested in theatre and so there is little discussion in depth. Similarly with work colleagues, it can be simply a matter of saying that they had been to see the performance and had enjoyed it. Rob summarizes these possibilities and adds the dimension, crucial for community, of whether other people are interested in theatre.

> [I mentioned *Private Lives*] to people at work and the family . . . not in detail but just to say we'd been . . . You often mention what you did last night, or somebody's talking about what they've seen, and you tell them what you've seen as well. You talk to people who have similar or shared interests. We've got some friends in an amateur operatic society, so we often discuss with them what we've seen.

Friends, of course, share interests and Muriel points out, "Most of my friends enjoy going to the theatre, so if any of us have been to anything we tell the others." The majority of this discussion with people other than theatregoing companions concerns their pleasure and enjoyment, and this is the basis of any community formation that occurs. Pam's book group presents an opportunity, rare among these respondents, for sharing cognitive changes. She describes their activities as follows: "We often try and read something that's being produced at Theatre by the Lake, so that we have the opportunity of seeing it and discussing it as well as reading it."

Theatre practitioners stress the importance of theatre as an arena for debate. The *Private Lives* director and actors' post-performance talk at The Octagon presented an opportunity for discussion of changes in audience perception, and illustrates how such debate can influence community formation. Helen and Ruth attended the talk and the major topic was the violence in the play. The discussion encouraged both of them to consider their own ideas about domestic violence as outlined in the section on cognitive changes in Chapter Seven. Both were doubtful

about the general view that the violence was acceptable as long as both partners were violent. In effect, therefore, they are forming an alternative community based on a different interpretation of the issue.

Moving away from this discussion of shared cognitive changes, many of the other audience members present at the talk were fans of the male lead actor, who used to be in the cast of a soap opera set in the local area. The fans were taking the opportunity to see this actor perform live and also to meet him informally at the talk. To this extent, therefore, he is seen as a 'star', and his fans identify with him personally rather than, as regular theatregoers do, with his character in the play and his acting, as I discussed in Chapter Seven. Some of the audience member respondents suggested that the large weeknight audience was partly attributable to his presence in the cast. Further, this actor had previously performed at The Octagon in another production, and several respondents had seen him then. His performances in both plays featured in their discussion with their companions during the Intervals and at the end of the evening. This relates to the pleasure respondents took in the acting, which they also share. The fact that he had already performed in another production at The Octagon reflects one of the aspects of this theatre that Helen enjoys: they "have a variety of actors and some of them come back". On a smaller scale, this is like the more established repertory system at Theatre by the Lake.

Penny, one of the actors in *Blithe Spirit*, describes how the repertory system at Theatre by the Lake encourages a sense of community for both actors and audiences.

> Certainly one of the things that we hear a lot here - many of us have worked here before - is people constantly saying it's so lovely to see the same actors come back . . . People love to watch the actors do a variety of things . . . [They] like that connection with the actor, to see what that actor can do next. I think that's one of the things that works incredibly well here. I enjoy doing rep and it's nice when people come up to me in Keswick and talk about the plays. I feel part of the local community here.

Audience member respondents do appreciate the actors' work in different roles, as the following two quotations show. Describing discussion with her companions at the end of *Blithe Spirit*, Barbara says,

> We remarked upon how [the actors] could adapt from one role to another and be believable; they just slotted into the role. So you weren't carrying past roles with you. You've seen them in something else but you actually switched over with the actors from their previous roles. That, to me, is very, very good. You didn't see anything of other past characters that they've played slipping in.

Derek relates seeing one of the actors again in *Blithe Spirit* to how he has always enjoyed repertory theatre.

> [I'd seen the leading actor before] and he's brilliant; really, really good, so I was delighted to see him again. That's what I loved about rep: that you saw the same cast playing different parts. I always liked rep for that, because it interests me how they can take on a different persona. I've always liked that.

Again, discussing the acting relates to the pleasure respondents take in it, and the critical interpretations they make in these terms. Familiarity with the actors adds another dimension to their shared interpretations and further contributes to community experience. Two other respondents also emphasize the importance to them of familiarity with the actors. Referring to the male lead again, Jenny comments,

> He's been through several seasons and we've grown to know and love him. And he's still finding parts that are good. We always used to say, 'Cary Grant was always Cary Grant, and Clark Gable was always Clark Gable really.' But he manages to come within the parts, so he's very good at taking on the characters that he does. It is his face that we know; that we've seen before.

Louise describes the familiarity audience members can feel with actors they have seen previously.

> We discussed the acting because we'd seen some of the actors in productions here before. When that happens you almost feel like they're part of the family. Because you've seen them before you tend to be emotional about them. 'Oh she was in that and she was really good, and she's done a good job in this one.' Although you don't know them, they're familiar to you.

Playing in repertory theatre is conducive to actors feeling part of the local community as Penny suggested above. They are resident in the community for at least one season, rather than visiting a theatre for a single production or on tour. Nigel also feels accountable to the local community and emphasizes the importance of debate in selecting productions. He says,

> I like being accountable to the local community for what we're trying to do. People say, 'I didn't understand that play. Why did you pick that one?' As if it's me personally who picked it. You say, 'Well, we did it for these reasons.' Maybe we should have explained it better, or maybe we should have picked another play. But you need to know these things. You have to talk to your audience. You have to. I love meeting audiences afterwards; not because they say nice things, which they always do, but you want to have a debate with them.

Most of Nigel's work is in regional repertory theatre, and he stresses the importance of such theatres as a resource for the local community.

> It's saying to people this [theatre] is in your community; it is a resource for you; you have an input here. This particular theatre draws its audience largely from Cumbria, even though there are so many tourists, and very much from Keswick. It's wonderful to meet people in Keswick who, because they belong to the Operatic Society or they work in the bar here or whatever, feel that it is for them a walk-in place; they feel part of it.

Nigel is explaining how repertory theatre in a local community can produce a dialogue between producers and audiences, enhancing the possibilities for community experience for them both. So far in this chapter I have discussed respondents' communication practices outside the auditorium, and the extent to which changes in audience perception are shared. In the next section I consider how the meanings of theatre facilities and buildings contribute to theatregoers' community experience.

The Meanings of Theatre Places

I consider the data here in the light of ideas on the emotional significance of place, and how far it contributes to community experience. As I discussed in Chapter Three, Couldry (2000) highlights the emotional importance of place to fans, and Sandvoss (2005) argues that the significance fans attach to places is similar to the attachment people have to ideas of 'home', where this refers to "physical, emotional and ideological space" (64). Young and Willmott (1957), on the other hand, emphasize that people are more important than buildings in engendering community spirit. For each theatre I look first at the importance to respondents of its facilities. This relates to their enjoyment of the whole theatregoing event, which as seen in the previous section is a source of sharing and community. Second I discuss the meanings of the theatre buildings to them, considering how these relate to community

experience.

Vic is one of the tourist respondents at Theatre by the Lake. I quote his description of facilities there to take up Nigel's ideas in the last section and show that the theatre is also seen as a community centre from further afield than Keswick itself. Vic says,

> I think Theatre by the Lake is the best thing that's ever happened to Keswick. A lot of people go now. You can go in during the day; there's a coffee shop there. You've got the café downstairs and one upstairs. You can go on a tour of the theatre and go into the dressing rooms and backstage. It's not like the [Liverpool] Empire, where the only thing that's open is the box office. It's more like a community thing.

Respondents who travel from the outlying areas to the theatre much appreciate the facilities. Jenny and her group are typical in that they usually arrive early and have a coffee. Annette and Bernard, too, take advantage of these facilities. Annette describes how she enjoys the whole theatre event, saying, "You have the pleasure of an evening out. We usually have something to eat just before the performance, go into the theatre, come back home and talk about it afterwards." There is another reason why Annette likes Theatre by the Lake. She suffers from asthma and the modern building is better for this condition. She says,

> I find the modern set up of Theatre by the Lake very interesting and very good. I have asthma and I have to be careful in some of the old theatres because of the dust. I have no problem at Theatre by the Lake. We lived in Glasgow, and I remember going to the theatre there once, and I had an awful job to breathe. There was building work going on as well as the dust in the theatre furnishings.

Another respondent, who appreciates the modern building at Theatre by the Lake and the fact that it is fairly small, is Beth. She is disabled, and outlines the importance to her of access to the theatre, contrasting Theatre by the Lake with some of the larger, older theatres.

> I find Theatre by the Lake easy because sometimes I have to use a wheelchair. The theatre's ideal for me. It's easy to get into. They'll take a seat out and just leave the chair in . . . Older, larger theatres are too crowded, too many people. People just don't have time for anybody in a wheelchair or anybody on walking sticks.

Like uncomfortable seating and difficulty of hearing and seeing, these basic physical aspects of theatregoing are important to respondents. If they are not fulfilled the chances that they will experience a sense of community are reduced. Bernard links Theatre by the Lake's facilities and the setting of the building in his description of the whole theatregoing event.

> We like to go to Keswick because of the situation as well. So it's not only the play that we go for; it's the setting. We like to have something to eat in the theatre beforehand. It's very attractive, the whole experience, and so we make a half day or sometimes a whole day of it. We've been on the lake sometimes and then go on to the theatre afterwards.

Facilities at Theatre by the Lake are therefore much appreciated by respondents, contributing to their enjoyment of the whole theatre event. This is shared with their companions and encourages community formation.

Focusing now on respondents' ideas on the Theatre by the Lake building, the site on which it is constructed is meaningful to respondents, because many of them remember and used to attend the travelling Century Theatre, when the Blue Box came to the car park next to Derwentwater for the summer. Jenny, for example, says, "We've been going to the theatre at Keswick since it was the Blue Box", and Joan describes her view of Theatre by the Lake and her memories of the Blue Box as follows:

> I like Theatre by the Lake. I used to go to the Blue Box. I can remember the first time I went getting absolutely soaked, because the rain came in. But I still liked it because it was so intimate.

The location of Theatre by the Lake thus has a long history, and respondents share happy memories of the Blue Box, despite the damp. Regarding the new building, Beth says that she and Vic "used to go up and watch [Theatre by the Lake] being built . . . It's great, really good". Now that the theatre has been open for a few years, respondents make the following comments about it. Marjorie finds the smaller, modern building "more informal" than the bigger London theatres, and Louise says, "We're always amazed at how lovely they've made it." The ultimate comment is Vic's, when he says, "We go to the Lakes for a holiday and the theatre is the jewel in the crown." Respondents therefore share the history of the theatre site and an

appreciation of the new building, both of which contribute to their community experience of the wider theatre event.

Since The Octagon is much closer to where respondents live than is Theatre by the Lake, fewer of them take advantage of its facilities. Helen does make use of them, saying, "I go for coffee sometimes there, or a quick lunch. Once we went for the meal before the evening performance." In fact the convenience of The Octagon is something that is important to respondents. Ruth says, "I think we're very lucky in Bolton having The Octagon so close to us. It's very convenient for me." David comments, "The Octagon's fine for us. A ten-minute drive, ten minutes parking your car, and an enjoyable evening." Like the disabled facilities Beth appreciates at Theatre by the Lake, the ease with which audiences can access the theatre contributes to their enjoyment of the whole evening out, which again is shared with their companions.

The oldest respondent, Alice, is the only one to mention remembering The Octagon being built, and she was very involved during its early days. She says,

> My husband was a trustee at The Octagon. I remember the rubble before it was built, and we saw it built. We went to the opening with Princess Margaret. We wives ran the programmes and the café, which wasn't even a real one then. We had a lot of fun. We've just grown with it. It was lovely.

Like many theatres, The Octagon has suffered the threat of closure, which focuses audiences' minds on what the theatre means to them. Jill, for example, says,

> I enjoy going to The Octagon. I know not long ago they were thinking of closing the place down. I was quite concerned because I do enjoy going. It would have been a great shame and I'm just glad that they kept it going.

The final two quotations here show just how meaningful theatres can be for their audiences. Beryl remarks, "I do feel so much at home. The Octagon's our local theatre. It's just like going into a familiar church." For Helen,

> The Octagon's like my rep; it belongs to me. I'm very comfortable there; it's like going home. When I go into a Manchester theatre it's not the same feeling. It's more like a friend you know, so you try to be with them a lot.

Having a longer history than the new Theatre by the Lake building, The Octagon's familiarity is an important shared meaning for respondents, whereas in Keswick it is the site that provides the shared history and meaning. In both cases such shared meanings offer enhanced community experience for their audiences.

The above data on theatre facilities and buildings show that they are of considerable emotional significance to respondents in the same ways that Sandvoss (2005) argues that places are important to fans. In this thesis I have argued that interpersonal communication is very important to the formation of community, and this is in agreement with Young and Willmott (1957) that people are vital to community spirit. However, I also suggest that buildings can offer considerable community experience. Unlike the new buildings that Young and Willmott describe as lacking in conduciveness to community spirit, the theatres I have considered in this research have histories that are very significant for respondents' community experience. They also provide a focus for shared interests and continuing community experience. As far as Theatre by the Lake is concerned, this focus, I suggest, links locals, incomers and tourists, and is therefore a counter to the conflict between such groups indicated by Newby (1985) in his study of community and conflict in rural areas. In the conclusion I draw out the main themes arising from the above data on respondents' everyday communication, and the meanings of theatre places to them, and relate them to community experience.

Conclusion

In concluding the discussion of the data on the wider theatre event, I draw out how far and in what ways respondents' communication practices outside the auditorium and in their everyday lives, and their ideas about the theatre facilities and buildings, contribute to an understanding of community experience. Regarding how respondents heard about the research performances, in addition to receiving the theatre brochures, most of them experienced some form of interpersonal communication when making arrangements for theatre visits. This was through the organizers of informal theatregoing groups, or through friends or family members. The regularity of these arrangements encourages the development of small communities, based on shared interests, within the larger theatregoing community.

Discussion of the performances with their companions during the Intervals and at the end of the plays is an important part of respondents' theatregoing, and mostly concerns their pleasure in the performance and overall enjoyment of the evening out. Affective changes are personal and are shared with companions only infrequently. As discussed, cognitive changes tend to emerge later, but again they are only occasionally shared. Community experience here, therefore, is through the pleasure respondents take in the performance, which is a shared interest, and their enjoyment of the evening out they share as friends.

How much respondents share their theatre audience experiences with people other than their theatregoing companions depends on their existing social networks, and is much greater for The Octagon respondents than for the Theatre by the Lake respondents. The incomer respondents in Cumbria are particularly lacking in local social networks. Conversations take place about the performances among work colleagues, friends and family members, but these are mostly a matter of exchanging information about what people have been doing recently and whether they have enjoyed it. Discussion only has greater depth when the interest in theatre is shared. Through discussion with theatregoing companions and others, the research performances are supportive of community based on shared interests and friendship rather than on themes and issues. However, there is no denying the depth of individual affective and cognitive changes that emerged in the interviews.

I have stressed throughout the importance of interpersonal communication to the formation of community. The *Private Lives* post-performance discussion provided an opportunity to share and develop cognitive changes, and a couple of respondents took part. The group of fans who came to meet the male lead actor on an informal basis presents an aspect of community, based on their affective involvement with this actor, which is different from the community experience arising from theatregoers' discussion of the themes and issues emerging from the plays. In contrast, the repertory system at Theatre by the Lake develops not so much a fan base for actors as familiarity with them and an appreciation of the range of their work. This familiarity encourages a sense of community among audience members and between audiences and actors. It is based on pleasure in and critical interpretations of

the actors' performances rather than on affective involvement with the actor. The actors also feel part of the local community when audience members talk to them at the theatre or in Keswick. Further, this everyday interaction and debate between actors and audiences engenders a sense of accountability to the community on the part of the actors, and the possibility of input into the theatre by its audiences. This produces a dynamic that encourages community formation.

The facilities at Theatre by the Lake are open all day as well as in the evening, which is in contrast to many theatres in cities, where the only facility open, or indeed that they have during the day, is the box office. Theatre by the Lake has become a community centre, and its facilities are much appreciated by locals, tourists, and theatregoers who travel from outlying areas, contributing to respondents' enjoyment of the whole theatre event. The modern building and easy access to it also assist disabled theatregoers' overall enjoyment. Facilities are less important to The Octagon respondents, who see the convenience of the theatre in terms of journey time as an advantage. Appreciation of facilities and convenience adds to respondents' enjoyment of their evening out, and is shared with companions, contributing to their community experience of the wider theatre event.

Both theatre buildings provide a focal point for theatregoers, encouraging a sense of community as places where people who share interests can gather. At Theatre by the Lake this serves to link locals, incomers and tourists, and reduce the conflict between such groups in rural areas noted by Newby (1985). The site at Theatre by the Lake and the familiarity of The Octagon hold important meanings for many respondents. Theatre by the Lake replaces the old Blue Box; respondents have watched it being built, in keeping with its surroundings; and they are sharing in its success. The oldest respondent at The Octagon remembers its very beginnings; others have supported it through threat of closure; and some are so attached to their local theatre they say it is like "home". Such meanings strongly support the idea of the emotional significance of place, and indicate that buildings as well as people can engender community spirit. Where these meanings are shared with companions and other theatregoers, community experience is enhanced. In the following Conclusion

to the thesis I draw out the main findings of this research into theatre audiences, and relate them to the issues of community raised in the early chapters.

CONCLUSION

In this Conclusion I draw out the key findings of my research into theatre audiences and show how they contribute to the issues of community raised in the early chapters. As well as highlighting theoretical contributions, I discuss areas of methodological interest, point out where the research has contributed specifically to ideas about theatre production, and suggest directions for further research. My approach here is to address the main aims of the research directly, and to bring in the more peripheral concerns as the discussion progresses. There are three main sections therefore, the first of which discusses the nature of community, or what community is like. The second addresses processes of community formation, or how community is built, and finally, through a discussion of social change and community, I consider whether community is experienced in new ways.

What is Community Like?

The research has approached an understanding of the nature of community through a comprehensive investigation of a broad range of theatre audience contexts, which has proved a methodologically sound and illuminating way of uncovering the many layers of community experience. This approach has involved an examination of theatre audiences' demographic backgrounds, including age, gender, and social class. The research confirms that mainstream theatre audiences do tend to be middle aged, and this is seen among the respondents as a basis for community. They say, for example, that the audiences for the research performances were composed largely of people of a similar age, who responded especially to the time period in which the plays are set. The director of *Private Lives* notes that younger people enjoy different things about the performance, which indicates both that younger people form communities through their interpretive responses and, in their enjoyment of matters other than the time period, that community is also based on a wide range of features other than age.

Gender is another basis for community formation and experience. Again the research confirms that women form a large part of theatre audiences and, like age, community formation at theatre performances can be on this basis alone. Further however, the salience of female theatregoing groups among my respondents presents

another way in which community is experienced. These women share their emotional involvement in theatre performances, and this sharing of experiences recurs frequently in the data as a stronghold of community formation. In their focus on female cultural consumption, previous researchers such as Radway (1991), Kippax (1988) and Stacey (1994) have explored individuals' emotional involvement with characters in novels, film stars, and features of high culture, but there has been little emphasis on whether and how this is shared with others to underpin community experience. In contrast to my data, Kippax found that there was little discussion with others, and her respondents' consumption of the arts remained a contributory feature of the formation of autonomous individual identity only. My research has stressed exploring meanings in people's lives as an important ethnographic method, and this has proved helpful in examining themes of gender, cultural consumption and escape. Stacey noted that her respondents were escaping the deprivations of wartime Britain, and Radway and Kippax found in their studies that women escaped domestic patriarchy by setting aside time for themselves. This is not a significant meaning in the lives of the women in the female theatregoing groups in my research. They are indeed setting aside time for themselves, but rather they are escaping pressures of work, as indeed are the male respondents, and both males and females say that the relaxation that theatregoing offers is important to them. A further meaning in respondents' lives, and pertaining to the idea of theatregoing as escape, is that they see it as not only escape *from* their own lives but also *into* the lives and situations of other people. Theatregoing enables them to understand these other issues and lives, which they would not otherwise have the chance to do, and they find this very stimulating and involving. Sharing their individual involvement with others is an important basis for community.

The relationship between cultural consumption and social class appears from my data to be more fluid and complex than Bourdieu (2000) indicates. My theatregoing respondents are across a wide range of the middle class, including especially a number who can be described as lower middle class. Respondents' tastes in theatre are also eclectic. These characteristics of the sample suggest that cultural consumption is not closely tied to class gradations, as Bourdieu finds. In support of this view, I observe from my data that, among these regular theatregoers in the

Northwest of England, both lower and upper middle class respondents access high as well as popular theatre, and an appreciation of experimental theatre goes across the middle class spectrum, and so is not only the province of intellectuals, as Bourdieu indicates. The diversity in community that Cohen (1985, 1986) highlights is undoubtedly in play here.

In exploring a little further the properties of symbolic boundaries, and relating the data to Lamont's (1994) suggestion that weak boundaries are found where there is cultural tolerance, and strong boundaries where there is a tradition of high culture, my research has indicated further dimensions. I have suggested that weak boundaries are where only one party recognizes them, such as when someone says a play is not to their taste, while the person mentioning it, showing tolerance, would not exclude that individual. Indeed respondents recognize that there is a perception of theatregoing as a middle class pursuit, and are active in encouraging a wider range of people to attend. There is little sense of élitism or snobbery among them. In my data, strong boundaries are where both sides recognize them, and these do tend to be where someone has crossed perceived class, especially working class, boundaries. My argument, therefore, is that there is *some* distinction in cultural tastes between classes, but there is much greater fluidity than Bourdieu's findings show. In support of Lamont's indication that boundaries move according to where a person stands, respondents' views offer further examples, including especially what is considered acceptable behaviour at theatre performances.

I have employed recent ideas about omnivorous and univorous cultural practices to cast further light on class and tastes and, by separating cultural consumption from other activities, have found variations on these ideas. Respondents are univore in their cultural consumption of theatre, but omnivore in their other activities. The research, therefore, supports neither ideas of lower class univorous cultural consumption (Peterson and Simkus 1992, Bryson 1997), nor those relating to the upper middle class cultural omnivore (Peterson and Kern 1996). The overriding concern for these theatregoers, and what they are seeking out both through their cultural consumption and activities is, as I discuss further in the next section, community through interpersonal interaction.

Finally in this discussion of social class and cultural tastes, I highlight how respondents' life narratives have provided rich data on how they have become theatregoers. These data reveal that Bourdieu's concept of habitus accounts for only some of the processes through which people acquire cultural tastes and practices. Family and class do still influence these processes, and they continue to be handed down from generation to generation, but there is also a scenario where children's cultural activities influence parents to take up these same interests. Respondents' narratives show many other ways of developing theatregoing tastes and practices, especially through school, amateur dramatics, enjoying other forms of live performance and, notably, the people they meet during their life course. Conversely, such people can provoke a reduction in theatregoing, and there are variations in frequency of theatre attendance during the life course, for example when there are young children in the family. Again therefore, this longitudinal, qualitative research has extended Bourdieu's findings, suggesting greater variation in the ways cultural tastes and practices are formed, as well as how they, and the community that arises from them, are underpinned.

This discussion of how a focus on audience context can illuminate community has given some indication of the nature of community in the sense of its bases. What community is like comes further to light throughout subsequent discussion and, in a consideration of processes of community formation, in the next section I consider how community is built.

How is Community Built?

I mentioned in the last section the importance to respondents of community through interpersonal interaction. This thesis has noted methodological calls for the examination of communication practices in understanding audiences as communities (especially Tulloch 1990, Bird 1992, Jensen and Pauly 1997, and Baym 2000), and I have considered the focus on sharing and discussion among respondents as vital in taking the step from context to community. Communication practices have been approached in several ways in my research. The first is through an examination of respondents' social networks, and this has confirmed the importance of interpersonal communication to their community experience. I have already discussed the salience

of female theatregoing groups, but regular companions on theatre visits are the norm, and such groups form smaller communities within larger theatre audiences. These groups can be based on gender, genre, and venue, and discussion within the groups contributes to their community formation. The activities that respondents pursue, as distinct from their cultural consumption, offer interpersonal interaction and they participate actively in the societies they belong to. In these ways then, respondents' social networks involve the "norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" that Putnam (2000:19) suggests build social capital and community.

I have noted how theatre audiences have become increasingly active in recent times, as theatre conventions and dramatic forms have moved through naturalism to more expressionistic theatre. My research takes the opportunity that the study of theatre audiences offers to consider how their involvement as part of the development of the performance constructs community. At the heart of my examination of communication practices are the co-present interactions taking place at theatre performances. Considering actors' ideas on these interactions, as well as the views of audience members, has contributed greatly to the depth of understanding of the communication processes at work. Audience response has again been found to be a good indicator of community experience, not only in supporting Bennett's (1997) ideas about homogeneity of response where the audience is at capacity, but also as a focus of discussion on collectivity in the interviews. Respondents spontaneously introduce the idea of contagion, and the data support both Heritage and Greatbatch's (1986) findings that audience response builds up gradually, and Jefferson's (1979) study indicating that laughter invites others to laugh as well. Audience member respondents refer to feeling "part of" collective response and the event, or "involved" in the performance, and these are examples of how their own terminology assists an understanding of what community means to them. Audience response was very good at the research performances, which facilitated the examination of the communication processes taking place, as did the fact that the plays were comedy dramas. There is scope for future research to look at performances where response is poor, thus allowing a closer look at exclusion rather than inclusion. Similarly, other genres such as history or tragedy, where response is less overt than it is for comedy, could be

considered. Such avenues of research do, however, present the difficulties likely to be encountered in examining latent response.

By discussing respondents' views on the interactions between audiences and actors and among audience members, the research has been able to identify features of interpersonal interaction that encourage community and those that do not. Especially important in building community are sharing interests and knowledge of the play; dialogue; listening and concentrating; and recognizing appropriate boundaries to avoid intrusion or threat. Conversely, when such features are not found, community experience is discouraged. I feel sufficiently confident about these findings to relate them to interaction in everyday life. As a preliminary to this, the data extend Goffman's (1990) ideas on how individuals "manage" (14 et seq) the information they give to their 'audiences', by discussing the techniques actors use to deliver the text. My findings confirm the importance of non-verbal messages in face-to-face interaction, which both Goffman and Putnam (2000) highlight. At the same time, my identification of the features of interaction that encourage and discourage community offers further empirical evidence in support of Putnam's argument that interpersonal communication is vital to building trust and community.

In the research I also focus on how communication processes, audience response and community experience in the theatre are influenced by physical contexts. Theatre spaces, or auditoria, are another aspect of audience context, and their characteristics impact on community experience. Like the features of interpersonal interaction identified above, such characteristics can be related to community experience in everyday life. Thus, for example, respondents stress the importance of seeing and hearing in venues, and find optimum conditions for the generation of community in smaller theatres, and particularly in theatres in the round, where there is collective awareness and they feel involved in the performance. Respondents find the four hundred seater research theatres a good size for encouraging community formation. Also significant for the generation of community is the position of the audience in relation to the actors, and both actor and audience member respondents agree that where the stage is at the same level as the first row of

the audience this maximizes involvement in the performance. This confirms the views of theatre practitioners such as Peter Brook (in Wallace 1995) and Iain Macintosh (1993). The findings overall on theatre spaces, sizes, and shapes are useful for theatre studies and production, and respondents' enthusiasm for theatre in the round is particularly instructive. There is scope for further research into different sizes of venue, for example large, studio, promenade or open air theatre spaces, and different layouts within the space, such as courtyard or traverse configurations.

Theatre places as well as spaces feature in the construction of community, and I have examined them in the light of Young and Willmott's (1957) findings that people are more important than buildings in engendering community spirit and, in contrast, through discussion on the emotional significance of place in the literature on fans. The importance of interpersonal interaction to community has been shown above in the discussions on social networks and interactions at theatre performances. However, among the respondents, theatre facilities and buildings also influence their experience of community. The facilities at Theatre by the Lake particularly are much appreciated, and locals, incomers, and tourists all recognize the theatre as a community centre. The history attached to the site on which this theatre is built, where the old Century Theatre Blue Box used to be, is meaningful to respondents, and they share enjoyment of the new building's aesthetic and practical qualities. Respondents share meanings attached to the history of The Octagon and its survival despite threat of closure. I would argue, therefore, in relation to Young and Willmott's findings, that where buildings have a history, either in terms of longevity or the site on which they are built, or even perhaps where they offer aesthetic and practical qualities, they, as well as people, are significant in engendering community spirit. The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake provide a focus for theatregoers' shared interests and meanings, and are undoubtedly emotionally significant for them. Several respondents are so familiar with The Octagon that it is like 'going home' for them, where this refers to the physical, emotional and ideological aspects of home that Sandvoss (2005) identifies. The shared focus at Theatre by the Lake encourages community among locals, incomers, and tourists, reducing the conflict that Newby (1985) finds among these groups in rural areas. Looking at social networks in the urban and rural contexts of the two research theatres, they are closer knit for the urban

respondents in Bolton and local respondents in Cumbria than they are for incomers there, and the tourists who are not, of course, integrated into the population in the Lake District. These contexts and networks have an impact on how much discussion with others respondents have, and thus on the formation of community.

So far in this Conclusion I have discussed what community is like and how it is built, and these themes continue through the final section. Here I address specifically the issue of whether community is experienced in new ways in today's mediatized and globalized society and, further to this, what the research tells us about social change and community.

Social Change and Community

Understandably the preferences of the theatregoing respondents in my research are for live performance rather than mediatized production, and I have suggested that these forms of communication underpin co-present and imagined community respectively. Respondents seek out theatre performances because interpersonal interaction is important to them and they enjoy feeling part of the performance and the whole theatregoing event. They remark on their active involvement in theatre performances rather than the more passive experience of, for example, television consumption. Here again the actor respondents' views on their experiences of live and mediatized performance add depth to our understanding of the communication processes involved in both forms. Actors and audience members alike highlight the immediacy of response in the theatre, which encourages the dialogue between performers and audience and which is not present in film and television. Audience member respondents also enjoy other forms of live performance, they are or have been involved in amateur dramatics, and some play musical instruments.

Even though it is to be expected that theatregoers prefer live performance, their consumption of mediatized production is surprisingly low. The mediatized production they do choose to consume usually supports their interest in theatre, for example reading theatre reviews in the newspapers, and watching drama or programmes about actors on television. Such consumption certainly does not replace the co-present community they experience in the theatre, rather it complements it,

which supports Putnam's (2000) assessment that this is the greater likelihood, and is in agreement with the connection between offline and online lives that Baym (2000) also finds. Respondents' computer use is very low: few of them use a computer even to complement their theatregoing. One or two respondents do access theatre websites and book online, and there is an isolated case of discussion of performances by email.

I conclude that these respondents experience community through mediatized cultural consumption hardly at all. They choose to seek out the co-present community offered by live performance rather than go along with current trends of social change towards mediatization and globalization. I also find that there is little mobility among respondents, either in terms of travel, or more specifically through their cultural consumption. They do attend other theatres in the Northwest of England, and occasionally in London, but with nothing like the frequency with which they attend their local theatres, The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake. A few respondents enjoy the 'big musicals', and these are especially from among The Octagon respondents because of the proximity of Manchester. Respondents do not mention global cultural productions very much, and show little awareness of belonging to imagined communities of shared tastes and interests. Overall therefore, respondents' affective affiliation is undoubtedly towards The Octagon and Theatre by the Lake and the experiences of community they have there. Relating these findings to Urry's (2000) ideas that mobilities are more salient than localities, and Morley's (2000) argument that locality is reconstituted but still very important to people, these theatregoing respondents resonate strongly with ideas of "home territories". In the face of fragmentation and impersonality in present day society, co-presence and the communication processes it generates, are essential to respondents' community experience.

Considering finally audience changes in perception, and how they relate, through theatre as an arena for debate, to community and social change, I have discussed especially audience members' interpretive practices and how much they are shared through discussion with others. My findings have led to a re-structuring of previous categories of interpretive practices, primarily because of the salience in the data of respondents' discussion of the pleasure and enjoyment they experience at

theatre performances, which they share extensively with their companions and also with others. I have related this pleasure and enjoyment to cultural consumption practices rather than to the psychological interpretations encountered in the literature on fans (Stacey 1994, Hills 2002, Sandvoss 2005). This re-structuring has also led to a separation in Liebes and Katz's (1993) categorization of critical interpretations between themes and issues, which I call cognitive changes, and interpretations relating to structure, genre and production, which are matters discussed by my respondents in terms of their pleasure and enjoyment.

Underlying the re-structuring of categories of interpretive practices are differences between theatregoers and fans. Whereas fans are affectively attached to the stars as individuals, my theatregoing respondents are interested in the actors' work and performances rather than in the actor as a person. The success of the repertory system at Theatre by the Lake is supported by this interest. The major difference between fans and theatregoers is that fans are performative, whereas this is a rare feature of theatregoers' interpretive practices. While my earlier discussion of respondents' eclectic tastes in theatre indicates that there is no real distinction between art and entertainment, perhaps the different relationships between fans and stars and theatregoers and actors' work indicate that some vestiges of difference remain. There are also similarities between fans and theatregoers, such as the ways in which communities of fans and interpretive communities evolve, and the quantitative and qualitative affect they feel, as Grossberg (1992) describes these characteristics of cultural consumption.

My data show that affective and pleasure and enjoyment interpretations are shared through audience response at performances, and this is a major source of community experience. Affective interpretations are not shared a great deal with others, even companions, because they tend to be personal. Pleasure and enjoyment interpretations, on the other hand, are shared with companions and form the main basis for the construction of community. This community experience, therefore, is based on shared interests and emotional involvement, as discussed earlier, and on the friendship respondents have with their companions. Respondents' cognitive changes in perception, which relate especially to themes and issues in the subject matter of the

plays, can arise from affective impact created during the performance, and tend to surface in respondents' minds as they go on with their everyday lives. While they are not shared very often with companions, or others in the course of their lives, during the interviews the extent of these cognitive changes was shown to be considerable. Occasionally, a major issue, such as the domestic violence raised by the performance of *Private Lives*, is discussed with companions and, as it happened, in the post-performance discussion.

Although they are not shared very much, the range of issues and questions raised in respondents' minds by these mainstream plays is impressive, supporting Raymond Williams's (1979) ideas on subjunctive realism, and McGrath's (1996) view that theatre can be transformative. This contrasts with the more pessimistic views taken in the critical realism debate (MacCabe 1981, McArthur 1981) that television drama does not produce such changes in audience perception, although Tulloch (1990) indicates the polysemy of texts and interpretations for television production, and the importance of sharing interpretations. I would argue, with McGrath, that theatre has greater potential to arouse changes in audience perception through its liveness. If responses to the mainstream plays examined in this research have produced such extensive individual changes in perception, there is reason to be optimistic about how great they could be for more experimental productions. There is scope for future research to examine responses to such productions and, especially, to consider whether and how they are shared. In these terms, it is not outside the bounds of possibility to argue that theatre, and the community it has the potential to encourage, can influence social change.

It is implicit in the findings of this research that the trends of social change towards mediatization and globalization are having an adverse effect on community because respondents reject these areas of cultural consumption in favour of live performance. Yet they are still easily able to find fulfilment through the kind of co-present community experience they prefer. Face-to-face community indeed "refuses to fade away" (Morley 2000:211). This look at community through the lens of theatre audiences' co-present interactions and trajectory of experience, rather than through geographically local or imagined groups, has illuminated the nature of

community, processes of building it, and how it is experienced. It has dispelled a little of its intangibility.

APPENDIX ONE

THE OCTAGON AND THEATRE BY THE LAKE
LOCATIONS, BUILDINGS AND AUDITORIA SEATING PLANS

The Octagon, Bolton and Theatre by the Lake, Keswick in Northwest England
Source: http://uk.multimap.com

The Octagon Theatre

Source: www.octagonbolton.co.uk

Seating Plans at The Octagon

Source: www.octagonbolton.co.uk

Theatre by the Lake

Source: www.theatrebythelake.com

Seating Plan at Theatre by the Lake

Source: www.theatrebythelake.com

APPENDIX TWO

THE OCTAGON CONTACT SHEET

The Octagon and Salford University are doing some theatre audience research. It involves a half hour chat in your own home and there is a prize draw for a pair of free tickets. Would you like to take part? Could I take some contact details please?

Name..... Male/Female (**Please Circle**)

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Home Tel..... Work Tel.....

Mobile..... Email.....

Occupation/Retired Former Occupation (**Please Specify**).....

OR

Jobseeker/In Education (**Please Circle**)

Age 15-24..... 45-54..... 75 and over.....

25-34..... 55-64.....

35-44..... 65-74.....

How often do you come to The Octagon?.....

Which other theatres do you attend?.....

What are your favourite kinds of theatre?.....

(Modern Drama/Classical Drama/Comedy/Thrillers/Musicals/Dance etc)

I'll be in touch soon to arrange a time. Thank you very much.

Sylvia Hayes/Contact Octagon/Feb 2003

DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS SHEET

Name.....

Marital Status Married/Cohabiting/Divorced/Separated/Single/Widowed

Children Do you have children living **at home**? **Yes/No**
How **many**?
Are they **male** or **female**?
How **old** are they?

Income (per annum) - before tax and any other deductions

Individual

Under £10,000..... £50,000-59,999.....

£10,000-19,999..... £60,000-69,999.....

£20,000-29,999..... £70,000-79,999.....

£30,000-39,999..... £80,000-89,999.....

£40,000-49,999..... £90,000-99,999.....

£100,000 or more.....

Household

Under £10,000..... £50,000-59,999.....

£10,000-19,999..... £60,000-69,999.....

£20,000-29,999..... £70,000-79,999.....

£30,000-39,999..... £80,000-89,999.....

£40,000-49,999..... £90,000-99,999.....

£100,000 or more.....

Ethnic Origin What is your **ethnic** origin?

Data Protection Statement

Your details (name, address, telephone and email) will be held on The Octagon Theatre's Marketing List.

Are you happy to have information sent to you from the Octagon from time to time? **Yes/No**

The Octagon shares information with other selected arts organisation – do you agree to share your details? **Yes/No**

Would you be happy to give a further interview in a few months time? Yes/No

Thank you very much indeed for your time and help.

Sylvia Hayes/Demog/Mar 2003

APPENDIX THREE

RESPONDENTS' BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

Actors and Director

Name	***Location***	***Role***
Ged	The Octagon	Male supporting actor, *Private Lives*
Kate	The Octagon	Female lead, *Private Lives*
Nigel	Theatre by the Lake	Male lead, *Blithe Spirit*
Penny	Theatre by the Lake	Female supporting actor, *Blithe Spirit*
Peter	The Octagon	Director of *Private Lives*

Audience Members

Name	***Production Attended***	***Gender***	***Age Range in Years***	***Occupation Current or Retired***
Alice	*Private Lives*	F	Over 75	Secretary
Annette	*Blithe Spirit*	F	65-74	School Matron
Barbara	*Blithe Spirit*	F	55-64	Sculptor
Bernard	*Blithe Spirit*	M	65-74	Methodist Minister
Beryl	*Private Lives*	F	65-74	Housewife
Beth	*Blithe Spirit*	F	55-64	Nurse
Charles	*Private Lives*	M	Over 75	Architect
David	*Private Lives*	M	45-54	Building Site Manager
Derek	*Blithe Spirit*	M	65-74	College Design Lecturer
Enid	*Private Lives*	F	Over 75	Hospital Teacher
Gwen	*Blithe Spirit*	F	55-64	P/T Research Student
Helen	*Private Lives*	F	65-74	Primary School Teacher
Jack	*Private Lives*	M	45-54	NHS Education Officer
Jean	*Private Lives*	F	Over 75	Family Businesswoman
Jenny	*Blithe Spirit*	F	45-54	Telephone Operator
Jill	*Private Lives*	F	25-34	Police Officer
Jim	*Private Lives*	M	55-64	Civil Craftsman
Joan	*Blithe Spirit*	F	55-64	Electrical Retailer
Julie	*Blithe Spirit*	F	35-44	P/T Baker/OU Student
Karen	*Private Lives*	F	45-54	Hospital Administrator
Kay	*Blithe Spirit*	F	45-54	P/T Bank Clerk

Liz	*Private Lives*	F	45-54	Childminder
Louise	*Blithe Spirit*	F	45-54	Bank Official
Marjorie	*Blithe Spirit*	F	45-54	P/T Sales Assistant
Muriel	*Blithe Spirit*	F	55-64	School Admin Officer
Pam	*Blithe Spirit*	F	45-54	Probation Manager
Richard	*Blithe Spirit*	M	55-64	Dental Surgeon
Rob	*Private Lives*	M	45-54	Property Asset Manager
Ruth	*Private Lives*	F	55-64	Civil Servant
Sally	*Blithe Spirit*	F	45-54	Artist/Teaching Assistant
Susan	*Private Lives*	F	35-44	Cashier
Vic	*Blithe Spirit*	M	65-74	Milkman

APPENDIX FOUR

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

This research is to explore theatre audiences' experiences and we are interested in directors' and actors' views of audience response. Please feel free to expand on your replies and discuss issues that arise. Your replies will be treated in confidence.

Introduction
Have you enjoyed **directing** this production of *Private Lives*?

Audience Response
What did you think of **this evening**'s audience response, for example their laughter and applause?

Did you feel that any particular **social groups in the audience**, for example in terms of age, gender or class, responded at certain points in the performance?
Which social groups? **At which points**?

How did you think the **actors** reacted to the response?

How was the **performance** overall affected by audience response?

How did audience response at this performance **compare** to previous audiences' response to performances of this production?

How did the **size** of the audience affect response?

How did the **social composition** of the audience, for example in terms of age, gender or class, affect response?

Theatre 'Spaces'
Why do you like **directing** in the **Octagon auditorium**?

How does **directing at the Octagon** compare with directing in **other** types of auditorium?

What factors influence you to stage a production at the Octagon either **in the round** or with a **thrust** configuration?

Do you feel that the Octagon auditorium is particularly **appropriate** for this production of *Private Lives*? **Why**?

Changes in Audience Perception
Why did you **choose** to direct *Private Lives* now?

What **social issues** do you think it addresses?

How would you like the people who see this production to be **affected**?

Thank you very much indeed and very best wishes for *Private Lives*.

Sylvia Hayes/IntDIROCT/Feb 2003

ACTORS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

This research is to explore theatre audiences' experiences and we are interested in directors' and actors' views of audience response. Please feel free to expand on your replies and discuss issues that arise. Your replies will be treated in confidence.

Introduction
Did you enjoy yesterday evening's **performance**?

How was the **audience**?

Audience Response
How did you feel the audience response, their laughter and applause, for example, **developed**?

Did you feel that any particular **social groups in the audience**, for example in terms of age, gender or class, responded at certain points in the performance?
Which social groups? **At which points**?

How did you **react** to audience response?

How did it **affect** your performance?

How did audience response at yesterday evening's performance **compare** to previous audiences' response to performances of this production?

How did the **size** of the audience affect response?

How did the **social composition** of the audience, for example in terms of age, gender or class affect response?

Theatre 'Spaces'
How do you feel about acting in **the Octagon auditorium**?

How do you feel about acting in **other types of auditorium**?

Have you acted in any **large-scale commercial** productions? **Which**?
How did you **feel** about them?

Changes in Audience Perception
How do you think this production of *Private Lives* will **affect** people who see it?

What **ideas** might they come away with?

What **social issues** do you think this production of *Private Lives* addresses?

Thank you very much indeed and very best wishes for *Private Lives*.

Sylvia Hayes/IntACTOCT/Feb 2003

AUDIENCE MEMBERS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

This research is to explore theatre audiences' practices and experiences. Please feel free to expand on your replies and discuss issues that arise. Your anonymity will be preserved and your replies treated in the strictest confidence.

Introduction

How did you first become **interested** in going to the **theatre**?

How did you **hear about** *Private Lives* at the Octagon?

Why did you decide to go to it?

Did you make the **booking** yourself?

How did you **book**?

Where did you **sit** in the auditorium – Stalls A, Stalls B, or the Gallery?

Was your ticket **full price** or a **concession**?

Overall did you feel the price of the ticket gave you **good value for money**?

How much would you have been **prepared to pay** for your ticket?

Who did you go with?

Do you always go with the **same person or group**?

The Performance and Audience Response

What were your **expectations** about *Private Lives*?

How **did** you respond to the performance, for example through laughter and applause?

How do you feel the audience **as a whole** responded?

Did **you** feel part of the audience as a whole?

How do you think the **size** of the audience affected their response at this performance?

How do you think the **social composition** of the audience, for example in terms of age, gender or class, affected their response at this performance?

Discussion

How did you (and the people you went with) feel **generally** about this performance of *Private Lives*?

What sort of things **about the performance** did you talk about in the **Intervals**?

What sort of things **about the performance** did you talk about at the **end**?

Have you discussed it **subsequently** with other people?

Who?

Where?

Do you **usually** discuss productions you have seen with others?

Changes in Audience Perception

What **impressed** you most about *Private Lives*?

Did you think there were any **weaknesses** in the performance?

Have you **thought about** the performance much since you saw it?

What sort of things **affected** you?

What did you **identify** with?

What **social or human issues** do you think the production addresses?

Theatre 'Spaces'

Did you find the stage and auditorium at the Octagon **appropriate** for this production?

Why?

What types of theatre auditorium do you **like**?

Why?

What types of theatre auditorium do you **dislike**?

Why?

Other Theatre Activities

Do you belong to a **drama group**?

What do you **do** in it?

Do you belong to any **other theatre group**, for example a **Friends'** group or one that arranges **visits to theatres**?

Do you watch **drama on television**?

Have you watched anything **recently**?

Do you watch **programmes about drama** on television?

Which?

Do you read **reviews** of theatre productions?

In which **publications**?

Do you access **theatre websites** at all?

Which?

Do you use the **Internet** for information about theatre and drama?

How much of your **leisure time** would you say is spent on **theatregoing and theatre-related activities**?

Why, in the end, do you go to the theatre?

Other Leisure Activities
(**Interviewer Note:** Especially membership of **clubs**, **social groups**, **media** and **computer** use)

Can you describe a typical **week** in terms of your **leisure activities**?
(**Weekend**?)

When and where did you last go on **holiday**?

Is there anything at all you would like to add about your theatregoing practices and experiences?

Interviewer: Complete Demographic Details Sheet and attach to Contact Sheet

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BUILDING COMMUNITY:
A SOCIOLOGY OF THEATRE AUDIENCES

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TABLES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnographic study of theatre audiences and the ways in which they experience community. It is positioned within current debates on the mediatization and globalization of society, and the ongoing discussion as to whether social change has an adverse effect on community experience. Methodologically it emphasizes the investigation of audience contexts and collaborative practices among actors and theatregoers and between researcher and respondents. Audiences' own terminology is considered vital to understanding what community means to them. The thesis examines community experience across the whole trajectory of the theatregoing event, from theatregoers' backgrounds, through interactions at theatre performances, to discussion outside the auditorium and in their everyday lives. It argues that while theatre audiences conform to the perception that they tend to be middle aged and predominantly female, there are modifications to Bourdieu's findings that cultural consumption is closely related to social class gradations. In particular, mainstream theatregoers extend across the spectrum of the middle class and their tastes in theatre are eclectic. Similarly, the research finds that there are other ways than through habitus that theatregoers acquire cultural tastes and practices. A close consideration of interactions at theatre performances, and the physical contexts in which they take place, identifies features of interaction and auditoria that encourage or discourage community, and relates them to interaction in everyday life. An investigation of why theatregoers prefer live to mediatized performance, and an examination of changes in audience perception and how much they are shared with others, contribute to an assessment of the transformative power of theatre and of how far face-to-face community is perennial in society.

FIGURE 7.1: TYPES OF AUDIENCE CHANGES

	Type 1 **Affective Changes**	**Type 2** **Cognitive Changes**	**Type 3** **Cultural Changes**
Components	Identifications Emotional impact	Socio-political issues	Pleasure and Enjoyment
Literature	Stacey 1994 Grossberg 1992 Baym 2000 Liebes and Katz 1993 (Referential interpretations)	Williams 1979 MacCabe 1981 McArthur 1981 Liebes and Katz 1993 (Critical interpretations - themes and issues)	Radway 1991 Kippax 1988 Stacey 1994 Liebes and Katz 1993 (Critical interpretations - structure/genre/production)